



## Romania

### International Religious Freedom Report 2006

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The constitution provides for freedom of religion; while the Government generally respected this right in practice, some restrictions adversely affected the rights of many religious groups. Minority religious groups also continued to claim credibly that low-level government officials impeded their efforts at proselytizing and interfered with other religious activities.

There was no overall change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report. The Government continued to differentiate between recognized and unrecognized religions, and registration and recognition requirements continued to pose obstacles to minority religions. The Government proposed a new law on religious freedom that remained under debate in Parliament. Many domestic nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, and religious groups criticized the draft law, expressing concern that the draft law, if passed, would institutionalize discrimination against many religious minorities and create impediments for many such groups to obtain official recognition as a religion. The Government still had not passed legislation to return to the Greek Catholic community the churches and church property transferred by the communists to the Orthodox Church in 1948, nor had it shown any inclination to do so by the end of the period covered by this report. The Government continued progress in recognizing the true history of the Holocaust in Romania, establishing and opening a new Elie Wiesel Institute for Romanian Holocaust Studies. This move was based on a recommendation made in a report released in 2004 by the International Commission for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, commonly called the Wiesel Commission. The Government also took additional steps towards introducing the issue of the country's role in the Holocaust into school curricula and launched the first textbook about the Holocaust in the country in October 2005. Some minority religions continued to complain of lengthy delays in the process of granting construction permits, which they claimed were based on their status as minority religions. Although restitution of religious property continued to be slow, several important buildings were restituted to religious denominations after the passage of property legislation in July 2005. In February 2006, the Government approved new regulations related to religious assistance in penitentiaries, which allow the free access of all religious groups to prisons.

Relations among different religious groups were generally amicable; however, there were incidents in which the Romanian Orthodox Church showed some hostility toward non-Orthodox churches and criticized the proselytizing of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups. The Orthodox Church in general continued to prevent the return of Greek Catholic churches that it received from the state after the dismantling of the Greek Catholic Church by the communists in 1948.

The U.S. government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government, including at the highest political levels, as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. During the year, the U.S. Embassy continuously expressed concern about discriminatory components of the draft law on religion, including with the prime minister, members of Parliament, and the minister of culture and religious affairs. The embassy also continued to raise concern with officials about the failure of the Government to ensure the full restitution of religious properties, including Greek Catholic churches. The embassy sponsored numerous events on religious freedom, including visiting speakers from the United States and a program of active outreach to a wide range of religious groups. The embassy also supported extensively the Government's efforts to recognize the true history of the Holocaust in Romania, including the implementation of the recommendations in the 2004 Wiesel Commission report, the training of teachers to teach the history of the Holocaust in the country, and the commemoration of the country's Holocaust Remembrance Day. The embassy continued to encourage government and religious leaders to respect religious freedom fully.

#### Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of approximately 91,699 square miles and a population of approximately 21.7 million.

The Romanian Orthodox Church was the predominant religion in the country. The Government officially recognizes eighteen religions: the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara (originally listed as part of the Orthodox Church), the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Old Rite Christian (Orthodox) Church, the Reformed (Protestant) Church, the Christian Evangelical Church, the Romanian Evangelical Church, the Evangelical Augustinian Church, the Lutheran Evangelical Church-Synod Presbyterian, the Unitarian Church, the Baptist Church, the Pentecostal Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Armenian Church, Judaism, Islam, and Jehovah's Witnesses (first recognized as a religion in 2003). Members of other faiths worshiped freely but were not afforded various forms of state support.

According to the 2002 census, the Romanian Orthodox Church (including the Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara) had 18,817,975 members, which comprised 86.8 percent of the population. The Roman Catholic Church had 1,026,429 members. The Greek Catholic Church had 191,556 members, although this figure was disputed by the Greek Catholic Church, which claimed that there were many irregularities, such as census takers refusing to note Greek Catholic affiliation and automatically assuming Orthodox affiliation, which led to an inaccurate result. The Greek Catholic Church estimated in 2003 that its adherents numbered more than 790,000. (Greek Catholics were former members of the Romanian Orthodox Church who, in 1697, accepted principles required for union of the Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholic Church, but continue to maintain many Orthodox observances and traditions.)

The Old Rite Christian (Orthodox) Church had 38,147 members. The Protestant Reformed Church had 701,077 members. The Christian Evangelical Church had 44,476 members. The Romanian Evangelical Church had 18,178 members. The Evangelical Augustinian Church had 8,716 members. The Lutheran Evangelical Church Synod-Presbyterian had 27,112 members. The Unitarian Church of Romania had 66,944 members. The Baptist Church had 126,639 members. The Apostolic Church of God (Pentecostal Church) had 324,462 members. The Seventh-day Christian Adventist Church had 93,670 members. The Armenian Church had 687 members. There were 6,075 Jews, according to the 2002 census. The Jewish Community Federation, however, stated that it had approximately 10,200 members. Romanian Muslims, mostly Turks and Tartars, had 67,257 members. In addition, nongovernmental groups estimated that an additional 30,000 Muslims resided in Romania as noncitizen residents. Jehovah's Witnesses, which did not have legal status as a recognized religion at the time of the census, were estimated to have approximately 80,000 members and associates. According to the same census, the number of atheists was 8,524, and there were 12,825 persons who did not have any religious affiliation.

According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations ("the Secretariat"), most religions had followers dispersed throughout the country, although a few religious communities were concentrated in particular regions. Old Rite members (Lippovans) were located in Moldavia and Dobrogea. Most Muslims were located in the southeastern part of the country in Dobrogea, near Bulgaria and the Black Sea coast. Most Greek Catholics were in Transylvania, but there were also Greek Catholics in Bucharest and the Banat and Crisana regions. Protestant and Catholic believers tended to be in Transylvania, but many also were located around Bacau. Orthodox or Greek Catholic ethnic Ukrainians were mostly in the northwestern part of the country. Orthodox ethnic Serbs were in Banat. Armenians were concentrated in Moldavia and the south. Members of the Protestant Reformed, Roman Catholic, and Unitarian churches in Transylvania were virtually all ethnic Hungarians.

According to published sources, the Baha'i 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, Hare Krishna, and Zen Buddhism had active branches in the country; however, they were not officially recognized religions.

According to a nationwide poll conducted by the National Polling and Marketing Institute (INSOMAR) in April 2006, 6 percent of respondents stated that they went to church several times a week; 22 percent once a week; 23 percent several times per month; 34 percent only at Christmas and Easter; 12 percent once a year or less; and 3 percent not at all. A separate poll conducted in April 2006 by the Group for Social Surveys indicated that 85 percent of the respondents stated that the church was the institution they trusted most.

## Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

### Legal/Policy Framework

Although the constitution provides for freedom of religion, the Government exercises considerable influence over religious life through laws and decrees. The Orthodox Church exercises substantial influence in its dominant role among a majority of the population and policymakers. Government registration and recognition requirements continued to pose obstacles to minority religions. Several minority religious groups continued to claim credibly that low-level government officials and the Romanian Orthodox clergy impeded their efforts at proselytizing and interfered with other religious activities.

The communist-era decree 177/1948 remained the basic law governing religious denominations and allows considerable state control over religious life. Technically, very few of the articles of this law have been abrogated formally; however, according to the Secretariat, a large number of its articles have been nullified in practice by the constitution and a series of governmental decrees. Although several religious denominations and religious associations confirmed that articles stipulating the state's interference with or control over religious life and activities have not been enforced, such provisions still exist in the law.

The Government requires religious groups to register. There is no clear procedure for the registration of religious groups as religions. The Government has refused to recognize a number of religious groups since 1990.

The total number of recognized religions remained low. Under the provisions of the 1948 decree, the Government recognized fourteen religions; subsequently, it added the Greek Catholic Church (1989) and the Jehovah's Witnesses (2003). The Romanian Evangelical Church and the Christian Evangelical Church, originally recognized as one religion, were separated into two religions, while the Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara was also separately recognized from the Orthodox Church. The total number of recognized religions was eighteen. Recognized religions are eligible for state support; they have the right to establish schools, teach religion in public schools, receive government funds to build churches, pay clergy salaries with state funds and subsidize clergy's housing expenses, broadcast religious programming on radio and television, apply for broadcasting licenses for denominational frequencies, and enjoy tax-exempt status.

The Government registers religious groups that it does not recognize either as religious and charitable foundations or as cultural associations, a status which does not guarantee the same rights as a recognized religion.

Religious groups are registered under a government decree of 2000 on associations and foundations which became Law 246 in July 2005, and which abrogated Law 21 of 1924 and eliminated most of the bureaucratic obstacles in the registration process, including the minimum requirement of members needed to establish religious associations and foundations, and the requirement of the mandatory approval by the Secretariat. A 2003 ordinance reintroducing mandatory approval by the Secretariat for the registration of religious associations was abrogated in July 2005. Thereafter, religious groups no longer needed approval by the Secretariat in order to register as a religious association or foundation.

The number of adherents of each recognized religion in the 2002 census determines its state-provided budget. The Orthodox religion receives the largest share of governmental financial support. In addition, Orthodox religious leaders generally preside over state occasions.

In 2005, the Government allocated financial assistance for construction and repair works amounting to almost \$9.2 million (ROL 271,139 million) to the Orthodox Church. The Government allocated approximately \$432,500 (ROL 12,793 million) to the Roman Catholic Church, around \$273,000 (ROL 8,075 million) to the Greek Catholic Church, and approximately \$365,500 (ROL 10,815 million) to the Reformed Church. In the first three months of 2006, the Government allocated approximately \$3.5 million (ROL 104,340 million) to the Orthodox Church, \$73,000 (ROL 2,160 million) to the Roman Catholic Church, close to \$10,000 (ROL 300 million) to the Greek Catholic Church, and approximately \$150,000 (ROL 4,410 million) to the Reformed Church.

The law governing the rights of foreigners, revised in 2003, introduced a long-stay visa for religious activities. Visa requirements include approval by the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs, evidence that the applicants represent a religious organization legally established in the country, certification of medical insurance, and a criminal record review. The law no longer limits visa extensions to six months, a change considered positive by most religious groups. Although the law provides for up to five years of visa extensions, the Jehovah's Witnesses continued to complain that their missionaries were granted only two-year and even one-year extensions without any explanation. The Baptist Church also reported that its missionaries who did not have U.S. or EU citizenship received only visas of a maximum one-year duration. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also complained of inconsistent requirements and high fees to obtain or renew visas. There are penalties for any foreigner who stays without a visa, but such penalties do not appear to be linked to religious activities. The Secretariat reported that it recommended the approval of 924 visas and visa extensions for religious workers in 2005, and 230 in the first 4 months of 2006.

In February 2005, the Government abolished the requirement of a construction permit from a special national commission in order to build places of worship; instead, only local permits are required as with any construction. Minority religions, however, continued to report unjustified opposition by local authorities to granting such permits for some minority religious groups.

The Government did not adopt a new religion law to replace communist era legislation. The Parliament continued to debate a government-sponsored draft law on religious freedom since its September 2005 introduction. Although seemingly an improvement over previous proposals, civil society and international organizations, such as the Council of Europe's Venice Commission, criticized its limitations. The Government did not consult with nonrecognized religions regarding the draft law. Of the eighteen recognized religions that were consulted by the Government, the Greek Catholic Church and Jehovah's Witnesses refused to support the draft law from the start, while the Baptist Church withdrew its support after its proposed amendments were excluded from the text. The U.S. Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (Helsinki Commission) also expressed strong concern. The draft law requires an inordinately high numerical threshold of 0.1 percent of the population-or approximately 22,000 people-to qualify for religion status, a membership number that even some recognized religions do not have. In addition, minority religions must undergo a twelve-year waiting period in order to qualify for the more preferential religion status. Civil society organizations recommended the elimination of both requirements. In December 2005, the Upper House delayed debating the draft and, in the end, passed the draft law implicitly without any debates or amendments. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Romanian Chamber of Deputies was awaiting recommendations by its human rights and legal committees before holding a debate on the draft law. According to the press, the Chamber of Deputies' human rights and legal committee voted in support of an amendment proposed by one of its members that would penalize "aggressive proselytizing" by religious groups or individuals with fines or six months to three years in prison.

Minority religious groups continued to assert that central government and parliamentary officials were more cooperative than local officials.

During the reporting period, the Secretariat, in partnership with the independent NGO Conscience and Liberty, sponsored symposia on religious freedom issues. Subjects included the relations between the church and the state, as well as churches' social assistance, at symposia in Bucharest (in September 2005) and Iasi (in October 2005). The Secretariat also met with representatives of religious groups on a regular basis and attended the meetings of leading bodies of some religious denominations. On April 30, 2006, the Secretariat was present during the Greek Catholic Church's celebration of the Holy See's elevation of its status to major archbishopric. According to the Secretariat, the Government continued its efforts to mediate and defuse tensions between the Orthodox and Greek Catholic churches in some local areas.

The National Anti-Discrimination Council (CNCD), an institution established to curb discrimination of any kind (including on religious grounds), received fourteen complaints of discrimination on religious grounds in 2005 and six in the first six months of 2006.

Christmas and the Orthodox Easter are national holidays. Members of the other recognized religions that celebrate Easter on a different date are entitled by law to have an additional holiday. Religious leaders occasionally play political roles. In particular, many Orthodox leaders make public appearances with prominent political figures, and religious messages often contain political promises or goals, and support for particular political positions.

Most mainstream politicians continued to criticize anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia publicly, and criticized attempts to deny the occurrence of the Holocaust in the country. On October 10, 2005, President Traian Basescu highlighted the country's need to recognize its true Holocaust history and to "acknowledge its own mistakes" in his speech on National Holocaust Remembrance Day. During a January 23, 2006, conference to commemorate the 1941 Bucharest pogrom, President Basescu highlighted the necessity "to present the realities of that time to the young generation." In April 2006, Parliament passed and the president signed into law a decree issued in 2002 to combat anti-Semitism and ban fascist, racist, and xenophobic organizations. The president had previously returned the law unsigned to Parliament in October 2005 to ensure the addition of language to include the persecution of Roma in addition to Jews in the law's definition of the Holocaust.

Most of the streets named after the country's pro-Nazi World War II leader Marshal Ion Antonescu were renamed. Cluj-Napoca renamed its street in 2004. Targu Mures renamed its street in October 2005, after human rights NGO Pro Europa League applied constant pressure on the city's mayor. A street named for Antonescu continued to exist in Cimpulung Muscel.

In 2003, the Government established the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, headed by Nobel Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel and consisting of thirty Romanian and foreign historians. The objective of the commission was to examine the history of the Holocaust in Romania; to identify the facts that took place during the Holocaust; and to disseminate the research results in the country and abroad. The organization of the commission—commonly called the Wiesel Commission—followed public statements made earlier in 2003 by then President Ion Iliescu, who minimized the Holocaust in Romania, and by former Information Minister Vasile Dincu, who denied the Holocaust in Romania. Iliescu subsequently asserted his comments had been misinterpreted, and the Government set up and fully supported the commission. In 2004, the Wiesel Commission presented its report. Iliescu praised the balance and objectivity of the report, publicly accepted its conclusions, and underscored the need for the country to come to terms with its past. The Wiesel Commission's recommendations included the Government's reversal of the previous rehabilitation of Nazi war criminals; establishment of a national Holocaust Remembrance Day; construction of a national Holocaust memorial and museum in Bucharest; and enforcement of legislation making Holocaust denial a crime. In addition, the commission recommended the comprehensive inclusion of the accurate history of the Holocaust in school curricula and textbooks.

In August 2005, the Government announced plans to build a Holocaust memorial in Bucharest and, in January 2006, launched a design contest for the memorial. In August 2005, the Government also established the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania, which opened officially on October 10, 2005.

The Government made some progress in its efforts to expand public school education on the true history of the Holocaust in the country. The Government continued a program on Holocaust education introduced in 2002 at the National Defense College. In addition, the Holocaust was taught during history classes in sections on World War II in the seventh and eleventh grades. The situation of the Romanian Jews between 1940 and 1944 was taught as part of the State, Society, and Culture course in the twelfth grade. In October 2005, the Government launched the first standardized textbook on the Holocaust and the history of the Jews in the country, which was used for an elective course offered to the eleventh grade throughout the country during the 2005-2006 school year; 330 groups of high school students elected to take the course during the year, and the Ministry of Education distributed 255 copies of the textbook to the schools. A second edition of the textbook remained under publication. The Government did not implement any plans, however, to make the course mandatory for all public high schools. The elective course was first offered in the 2004-2005 school year at 200 high schools, but without a standardized textbook at the time.

The Holocaust in Romania was explicitly mentioned for the first time in general school curricula for the tenth grade in 2004, and the curricula were implemented in the 2005-2006 school year. According to the Ministry of Education, the description of the Holocaust was taught in line with the recommendations of the Wiesel Commission. The Government also set up a teachers' association in Bacau and centers at universities in Cluj, Bucharest, Iasi, and Craiova to train approximately one hundred history teachers per year to teach the Holocaust. The Ministry of Education approved in 2005 a new Holocaust-teaching course (110 hours in duration) proposed by the director of the Bacau teachers' association. All centers began teaching the course in the 2005-2006 school year. In addition, the teachers received training in programs offered jointly by the Ministry of Education, Yad Vashem Institute, Centre de Documentation Juive Contemporaine (Paris), and the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C.

In March 2006, the Ministry of Education made available on its website a teaching guide to assist the 327 teachers nationwide who instruct courses on the Holocaust. The guide was translated from a document drafted by the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research, of which the country has been a member since 2004. The Ministry of Education also stated its intention to distribute 15,000 copies of this guide to school teachers. Throughout the period covered by this report, the Ministry of Education distributed 26,200 books in schools to be used as supplementary material in the teaching of the Holocaust; it also distributed 750 copies of the Wiesel Commission report and 900 CD/DVDs of a movie about the Holocaust in Romania. There were reports, however, that the number of books supplied was insufficient. The Ministry of Education continued to sponsor international seminars on the Holocaust and the teaching of its history. Two seminars were held in Bucharest in May 2006 for the training of teachers by a Yad Vashem speaker. The Government also earmarked funds amounting to \$83 thousand (ROL 2.45 billion) to sponsor a June 2006 conference in Iasi organized by the National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust to commemorate the 1941 Iasi pogrom.

In 2004, the Foreign Intelligence Service signed an agreement with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum to grant access to its archives for research regarding the Holocaust.

In 2004, in line with the recommendation later contained in the Wiesel Commission's report, the Government established an annual Holocaust Remembrance Day to take place on or around October 9, the anniversary of the first deportation of Jews from southern Bukovina to Transnistria. In 2004, the Government commemorated this date for the first time. On October 9, 2005, the country commemorated for two days its second Holocaust remembrance day with events in several cities, including one held by President Basescu at Cotroceni Palace. The events, many organized by local schools, were attended by officials and key dignitaries, including the president, prime minister, and foreign minister.

In 2004, then-President Iliescu awarded the nation's highest honor, the "Order of the Star of Romania," to extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party (PRM) leader Corneliu Vadim Tudor, known for making numerous xenophobic and anti-Semitic comments. Iliescu also decorated a well-known Holocaust denier, PRM Vice Chairman Gheorghe Buzatu, with the prestigious "Faithful Service" award. The granting of awards to these two individuals generated a wave of protest: Elie Wiesel announced his decision to return the Order he received from Iliescu in 2002, stating that he "cannot belong to any group of which Vadim Tudor is a member." Separately, a group of fifteen Radio Free Europe journalists decided to return the awards they also received from Iliescu. In March 2005, President Traian Basescu created new honorary boards for the country's decorations, which have the authority to review all awards previously granted. To date, the awards decorated to the PRM leaders have not been rescinded.

In April 2006, the Simon Wiesenthal Center, in its Annual Status Report on Worldwide Investigation and Prosecution of Nazi War Criminals for 2005, ranked the Government under the category "total failure." The category listed the countries that refused in principle to prosecute suspected Nazi war criminals, despite clear evidence that such individuals were residents within their borders. In May 2006, the Simon

Wiesenthal Center criticized the state for delays in the investigation of four suspected Romanian Nazi war criminals cases. The center had previously brought the four suspects to the Government's attention as part of the center's ongoing "Last Chance" operation to uncover unpunished perpetrators of the Holocaust.

In 2002, the Parliament passed legislation that could bar the return to the country of citizens who participated in Nazi war crimes but left the country during or after World War II. This includes individuals who lied about their participation in atrocities to obtain nationality in other countries, notably the United States. Embassy and other U.S. officials expressed strong concern about this legislation as well as the refusal of the country to accept the return of war criminals, noting that it represented a failure of the country to recognize the participation of its nationals in the Holocaust and to accept official responsibility.

The Government failed to take any action to reverse the 1997 decision by the Supreme Court to rehabilitate two war criminals, colonels Radu Dinulescu and Gheorghe Petrescu, who previously had been convicted of direct complicity in activities associated with the Holocaust in Romania.

#### Restrictions on Religious Freedom

There is no law against proselytizing, nor is there a clear understanding by the authorities of what activities constitute proselytizing. Although proselytizing is protected by law, several minority religious groups, which include both recognized and unrecognized religions, made credible complaints that low-level government officials and Romanian Orthodox clergy impeded their efforts to proselytize, interfered in religious activities, and otherwise discriminated against them during the period covered by this report.

Few politicians sponsored bills and measures that would oppose the Orthodox Church. Local officials tended to be tolerant, but there were incidents where they were pressured or intimidated by Orthodox clergy. In some instances, local police and administrative authorities tacitly supported societal campaigns (a few of which involved physical intimidation) against proselytizing by non-Romanian Orthodox religious groups.

Representatives of religious groups that sought recognition after 1990 alleged that the registration process was arbitrary and unduly influenced by the Romanian Orthodox Church, and that they did not receive clear instructions concerning the requirements. The Organization of the Orthodox Believers of Old Rite, the Adventist Movement for Reform, the Baha'i Faith, and the Mormons were among the religious groups that tried unsuccessfully to register as religions after 1990. Local leaders of the Baha'i Faith stated again that, during the period covered by the report, they did not seek registration because government officials told them that the group's status cannot be changed under the existing legislation. It took the Ministry of Culture and Religious Affairs three years to recognize Jehovah's Witnesses on the basis of a 2000 court ruling. The Mormons declared that, during the period covered by the report, the group repeatedly and unsuccessfully raised the issue with relevant government officials.

One reason that the Secretariat provided as an explanation for the failure to register new religions was that recognition requires a decree issued by the Presidium of the Grand National Assembly, a communist-era institution that no longer exists. Since no new legislation has been passed in this regard, the Secretariat stated that the registration of any new religion was not possible. Many minority religious groups pointed out that the proposed draft law on religion would still not provide the opportunity for new organizations to register, given the inordinately high thresholds set in the draft law.

Unrecognized religions receive no financial support from the Government, other than limited tax and import duty exemptions, and are not permitted to engage in profit-making activities.

Although, since February 2005, approval by a national commission for the construction of places of worship is no longer required, minority religions continued to encounter difficulties in obtaining construction permits at the local level. For example, Jehovah's Witnesses reported that, in some localities, mayors and municipal councils obstructed their plans to build places of worship by illegally conditioning permits on the agreement of all neighbors in the area or claiming that only certain types of construction can be built in a particular district. In Calarasi, Calarasi County, the Jehovah's Witnesses won a court ruling in December 2005 after local officials obstructed the construction of a place of worship in August 2004, but the mayor's office again appealed the case. In Odorheiu Secuiesc, Covasna County, the municipal council had not enforced a December 2005 court ruling in favor of the Jehovah's Witnesses. In Bistrita, the Jehovah's Witnesses congregation has tried to obtain a construction permit since 2004 and, despite a court ruling in their favor, the mayor's office has not issued the permit. In Targoviste, Dambovita County, the Jehovah's Witnesses tried to obtain a construction permit for several years without success. In February 2006, after the Jehovah's Witnesses obtained a favorable court ruling in November 2005, the mayor's office in Targoviste finally issued the permit. In Panciu, Vrancea County, and Bals, Olt County, the mayors' offices eventually issued the construction permits during the period of the report, after the Jehovah's Witnesses took the issue to court and repeatedly requested the permits. Other religions experienced similar difficulties. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Carlibaba, Suceava County, could not obtain a permit to build a church after purchasing the land in 2000. The mayor refused to issue a permit on the grounds that the members were too few to warrant a church. The Baptist Church also reported similar cases; in Insuratei, Braila County, local officials repeatedly refused to grant a construction permit, arguing that the number of Baptist believers was too small, and that they would need a referendum on this issue. The central Government did not respond to the Baptist Church's complaints. The Greek Catholic Church reported the refusal by local officials to issue construction permits in Pesceana, Valcea County, and Sapanta, Maramures County.

The law does not prohibit or punish assembly for peaceful religious activities. However, several minority religious groups complained that local authorities and Orthodox priests prevented religious activities from taking place, even when the groups had been issued permits. The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported difficulties in obtaining approvals to use public halls for religious activities following pressure by Orthodox priests. Even when they had rented public venues, on many occasions the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Baptist Church were forced to discontinue or cancel their religious programs. On November 20, 2005, in Dobridor, Dolj County, an Orthodox priest reportedly incited the local population to threaten the Seventh-day Adventist Church representatives with reprisals unless they stopped

proselytizing. Some policemen were sent to attend the religious gatherings and defuse the situation. After involvement of the mayor in fruitful discussions, no further incidents occurred. Between August 2 and 4, 2005, during religious lectures sponsored by the Baptist Church in a rented facility in Babeni, Valcea County, four Orthodox priests allegedly tried to stop people from entering the venue and to disrupt the program, despite approval of the facility rental by the city hall. In Saliste, Sibiu County, after the Jehovah's Witnesses filed a series of complaints of discriminatory attitudes displayed by local authorities, the problem was resolved during the period covered by the report, when the discriminatory behaviors ceased. The Jehovah's Witnesses also won a lawsuit against the Saliste mayor's office, which had demanded taxes for the Jehovah's Witnesses' places of worship despite the group's status as a religion. The mayor's office could appeal the court ruling, however. In Baia Mare, Maramures County, the mayor's office retroactively asked for tax payments incurred before 2003, the year in which the Jehovah's Witnesses acquired official religion status. The Jehovah's Witnesses took legal action against the mayor's office, since, according to a court ruling, it had been a religion since the year 2000. The lawsuit was in progress at the end of the period covered by the report.

According to the Jehovah's Witnesses reports, in January 2006, the court of Dragasani, Valcea County, rejected on religious grounds the appeal of a member of this faith in a divorce lawsuit. The court ruling gave as one of the reasons for rejecting the appeal the plaintiff's religious beliefs.

A Roman Catholic Csango community, an ethnic group that speaks a Hungarian dialect, continued to complain that they were unable to hold religious services in their mother tongue because of opposition by the Roman Catholic Bishopric of Iasi, which cooperates closely with the Orthodox Church. In August 2005, the Csango community filed a complaint with the CNCD, which decided on October 27, 2005, that the act of denying religious services in the mother tongue is a restriction on religious freedom. In December 2005, the Bishopric challenged the CNCD decision in court, and the case was still pending by the end of the period covered by this report.

The Government permits, but does not require, religious instruction in public schools. Attendance in classes is optional. Only the eighteen recognized religions are entitled to hold religion classes in public schools. While the law permits instruction according to the faith of students' parents, some minority recognized religious groups complained that they were unable to have classes offered in their faith in public schools. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Baptist Church, and Jehovah's Witnesses continued to report such cases. According to minority religious groups, the local inspectors for religion classes are typically Orthodox priests who deny accreditation to teachers of other religions. According to Greek Catholic reports, some school directors denied access in their schools to teachers of Greek Catholic religion. The Baptist Church also reported such a case in Tecuci, Galati County. Religious teachers are permitted to instruct only students of the same religious faith. However, minority religious groups, including the Greek Catholic Church, credibly asserted that there were cases of children pressured to attend classes of Orthodox religion, as happened repeatedly in the Greek Catholic eparchy of Oradea. The Baptist Church complained that some public schools indirectly forced students belonging to this faith to attend Orthodox religion classes in schools where Baptist religion classes were not taught. According to Baptist Church representatives, Orthodox religion classes were scheduled deliberately in these schools in the middle of the day so that Baptist students were required to attend, since they were not allowed to leave school early. The Baptist Church also reported that some school directors refused to offer Baptist religion classes even in districts where there were a large number of Baptist adherents, such as in Vaslui and Braila counties. The Baptist Church also reported cases, for example in Hotar, Bihor County, where school officials attempted to pressure Baptist students to change their faith. The Seventh-day Adventist Church continued to complain that, since 2002, the School Inspectorate of Cluj County excluded two out of the requested three classes on Adventist religion in the school curriculum, although there were sufficient students for three full classes. In addition, the Baptist Church continued to report that, at some festivities in public schools, all students, irrespective of their religious affiliation, must attend Orthodox religious services. The same reportedly continued to happen in the Army.

Until February 2006, only recognized religions were entitled to give religious assistance to prisoners; regulations on religious assistance in penitentiaries forbid proselytizing. The prison priest (always an Orthodox priest) had the responsibility to coordinate religious assistance in prisons. Some NGOs reported that prisoners were pressured against changing their religions, and that, in many cases, Orthodox priests attended the meetings of representatives of other religions with the prisoners. Minority recognized religious groups, including Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, asserted that Orthodox priests denied them access to some penitentiaries. The prison priest from the Orthodox Church denied the Seventh-day Adventist Church access to the penitentiary in Gherla, Cluj County; they also could not enter the penitentiary in Aiud, Alba County.

In August 2005, in response to a complaint filed by NGO Association for the Defense of Human Rights in Romania-The Helsinki Committee, the CNCD concluded that the legal provisions on military clergy and the agreement between the Ministry of Justice and the Romanian Orthodox Church regarding religious assistance in penitentiaries discriminate against minority religions by granting a privileged role to the Orthodox Church. The CNCD recommended that the Ministry of Justice eliminate the discriminatory provisions from the law.

On February 17, 2006, the Ministry of Justice changed the regulations for religious assistance in detention places. The new regulations provide for unrestricted access of recognized religions and religious associations to any type of detention places, even if their assistance is not specifically requested. According to the new rules, the National Administration of Penitentiaries (ANP) can bar the access of representatives of a religious group only if it can provide solid proof that the presence of the religious group in question actually endangers the security of the detention place. The regulations also forbid any interference of the management of penitentiaries with religious programs and forbid the presence of management representatives at the meetings between representatives of any faith and prisoners. Distribution of religious publications cannot be subjected to any restriction. Prison representatives in charge of religious assistance should not be priests or representatives of any faith. The new regulations were not uniformly applied, however, when the Jehovah's Witnesses requested access from the ANP to the penitentiary in Baia Mare, Maramures County. In March 2006, the ANP required the group to sign an agreement of cooperation with the penitentiary and to provide details of their religious assistance programs before they were given access. After the Jehovah's Witnesses submitted another access request in April, emphasizing that the new legislation permits unconditional access to prisons, the ANP in May allowed Jehovah's Witnesses missionaries to gain entry to the Baia Mare penitentiary without any further stipulations.

The law entitles recognized religions to have military clergy trained to render religious assistance to conscripts. According to minority

religions, however, the military clergy is comprised only of Orthodox priests, with the exception of two representatives of the Catholic Church and the Evangelical Alliance.

Media reported that, in September 2005, the Bucharest city hall illegally approved a permit for a property developer to construct a nineteen-story building directly next to the Roman Catholic Saint Joseph Cathedral, a historical monument in downtown Bucharest. The media alleged possible corruption or nepotism by Bucharest officials in granting the permit. In addition, after construction began at the site in May 2006, the Holy See and the Roman Catholic metropolitan archbishop released public statements protesting the decision to allow construction of a large building that they claimed would damage the structural foundation of the cathedral. More than 1,000 Roman Catholic Church members also held street protests against the construction. In May 2006, the Orthodox Church issued a public statement sharing the concerns of the Roman Catholic Church. Media also reported that a large building constructed by the same property developer near the Armenian church in Bucharest permanently ruined that church's structure.

Some NGOs and religious groups reported that the national identity card application form includes a section requesting completion of the applicant's religious affiliation. They expressed concerns that the accumulated data can be used to discriminate against non-Orthodox believers.

The Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute (MISA), a yoga organization, complained of repeated alleged persecution, harassment, abuse, and discrimination by the authorities for their spiritual opinions and beliefs. Members also claimed that their organization was the subject of a negative media campaign. In December 2005, the leader of this movement received asylum in Sweden on the grounds of being harassed.

Some religious groups complained that the National Audio-Visual Council made it difficult for radio frequency licenses to be purchased for religious broadcasting. Minority religions complained of a lack of provisions to provide for the free access of religious groups to state-owned media.

The Baha'i Faith complained that newspaper companies repeatedly rejected its request to publish paid articles, once after a contract had been signed and the Baha'i Faith paid the fees.

In many cases, religious minorities have not succeeded in regaining possession of properties, despite restitution by these decrees. Many properties returned by decree contain government offices, schools, hospitals, or cultural institutions that would require relocation, and lawsuits and protests by current possessors have delayed restitution of the property to rightful owners. In July 2005, new legislation to improve the process of property restitution came into effect. The law clarified and simplified the procedures for property restitution; broadened the scope of restitution; established new application deadlines and fines for the officials who hindered the process; and created a \$4 billion (ROL 117,884 billion) property fund to pay damages to former owners for properties that cannot be returned in kind. These provisions resolved some of the impediments to property restitution in earlier legislation that were criticized by religious denominations, i.e., not restituting the land of demolished buildings and not providing for compensation. Although the large majority of restitution cases of religious property remained unresolved, the pace of restitution increased slightly during the period covered by this report as a result of the new legislation. In many cases, local authorities refused to turn over restituted properties in which county or municipal governments had an interest and challenged the decisions of the Special Restitution Commission in court. There were many complaints that the local authorities consistently delayed supplying information about the reclaimed properties to the Special Restitution Commission, thereby obstructing the restitution process, despite the fines stipulated by the new legislation for such delays. The Office of Property Restitution reported at the end of the reporting period, however, that local authorities were improving with regard to supplying information. The number of restitution claims submitted by religious denominations increased because of the six-month extension of the deadline for the submission of claims, i.e., until January 25, 2006. The compensation process had not begun by June 30, 2006.

Law 501/2002 should provide for the restitution of all church properties. The buildings used by public institutions (such as museums, schools, and hospitals) are to remain in tenants' hands for a period of three or five years, depending on the function of the public institutions, during which time they are to pay rent to the churches. The majority of church properties belong to this category. However, this law does not address the distinctive and sensitive issue of the Greek Catholic churches, which were confiscated under communist rule in 1948 and handed over to the Orthodox Church. The July 2005 legislation again delayed solving the problem and stated that the issue would be addressed separately. By the initial March 2, 2003 deadline, religious denominations submitted 7,568 applications for restitution according to Law 501; by the 6-month extended deadline at the end of 2005, the number increased to 14,716 as follows: Orthodox Church, 2,215; Roman Catholic Church, 1,203; Greek Catholic Church, 6,723; Reformed Church, 1,208; Jewish, 1,918; Evangelical Church, 1,147; and other denominations, 303. The Special Commission for Restitution started its activity in 2003 and had restituted 1,592 buildings by the end of the period covered by this report. A total of 855 buildings were restituted during the period covered by this report, a much higher number than in previous years.

There were several high profile properties restituted during the period covered by the report. For example, in December 2005, the Government restituted to the German Language Evangelical Church the buildings of the well-known Bruckenthal Museum in Sibiu County, together with the museum's art collections.

The Greek Catholic Church was the second largest denomination (approximately 1.5 million adherents out of a population of approximately 15 million) in 1948 when communist authorities outlawed it and dictated its forced merger with the Romanian Orthodox Church. At the time of its banning, the Greek Catholic Church owned more than 2,600 churches and monasteries, which were confiscated by the state and then given to the Orthodox Church, along with other facilities. Other properties of the Greek Catholic Church, such as buildings and agricultural land, became state property.

Since 1989, the Greek Catholic Church, which has very few places of worship, has been given back fewer than 200 churches from the Orthodox Church. Many followers were still compelled to hold services in public places - more than 220 cases, according to Greek Catholic

reports. In Sisesti, Mehedinti County, services had to be held in the open. In 1992, the Government adopted a decree that listed eighty properties that were not places of worship owned by the Greek Catholic Church to be returned. After the restitution of sixty to sixty-five properties, mostly only on paper, no further progress was made. The most important buildings, including three schools in Cluj, were not restituted. Separately, the Greek Catholic Church accused the Bucharest mayor's office of having blocked the restitution of one of the eighty properties.

Some Orthodox priests, whose families were originally Greek Catholics, converted back to Greek Catholicism after 1989 and also brought their parishes and churches to the Greek Catholic Church. In the early 1990s, the Orthodox Archbishop of Timisoara, Nicolae Corneanu, returned to the Greek Catholics approximately fifty churches in his diocese that belonged to the Greek Catholic Church, including the cathedral in Lugoj. However, because of his actions, the archbishop experienced criticism from the Orthodox Holy Synod and his fellow Orthodox clergymen, several of whom opposed any type of dialogue between the two denominations. Relations between the Greek Catholic Church and the Orthodox Archbishopric of Timisoara continued to be amicable and cooperative. The Orthodox Bishopric of Caransebes continued to hold similar positive dialogues with the Greek Catholic Church.

For the most part, however, Orthodox leaders opposed and delayed returning churches to the Greek Catholics. The Greek Catholic Church of the eparchy of Lugoj complained that the Orthodox Bishopric of Arad, Ienopole, and Halmagiu did not follow through with a commitment to enter a dialogue with the Greek Catholic Church. The Orthodox Bishop of Arad, Ienopole, and Halmagiu also did not agree to a proposal by the Greek Catholic Church to hold alternating church services in churches that were historically Greek Catholic. At the end of the period covered by this report, the Orthodox Bishopric had returned no church to the Greek Catholics. Between July 1, 2005, and April 2006, the Greek Catholic Church recovered only five churches nationwide, the same number as in the previous year.

A 1990 government decree set up a joint Orthodox and Greek Catholic committee at the national level to resolve the situation of former Greek Catholic churches. The committee met for the first time in 1998, had three meetings in 1999, and then met annually after 2000; however, the Orthodox Church resisted efforts to resolve the problem in this forum. In many cases, the courts refused to consider Greek Catholic lawsuits seeking restitution, citing the 1990 decree establishing the joint committee to resolve the issue. In June 2005, Parliament passed into law a 2004 decree permitting the Greek Catholic Church to resort to court action whenever the bilateral dialogue regarding the restitution of churches with the Orthodox Church fails. Parliament initially rejected the decree but passed it after the president refused to sign the rejection law.

On November 20, 2005, after the intervention of the prime minister and the minister of culture and religious affairs, the Orthodox Church returned a cathedral in central Oradea to the Greek Catholic Church; however, despite the Orthodox Patriarch's promise to also reconstitute a major cathedral in Gherla, Cluj County, and a church in Bucharest, the Greek Catholic Church had not received the churches by the end of the period covered by this report.

From the initial property list of 2,600 seized churches, the Greek Catholic Church had reduced the number of its claims to fewer than 300. According to reports from the Greek Catholic Church, only sixteen churches were restituted as the result of the joint committee's meetings. Restitution of existing churches was financially important to both denominations because local residents were likely to attend the church whether it was Greek Catholic or Orthodox. Consequently, the number of members and corresponding share of the state budget allocation for religions were at stake.

The joint committee has practically ceased its activity since 2004, after the Orthodox Church expressed dissatisfaction with the Greek Catholic Church's answer to a letter that urged dialogue rather than court actions. The two churches did not resume dialogue through this committee during the period covered by the report.

Despite the stated desire for dialogue, the Orthodox Church demolished Greek Catholic churches under various pretexts. Greek Catholic churches - some declared historical monuments - were demolished in Vadu Izei, Maramures County; Baisoara, Cluj County; Smig, Sibiu County; Tritenii de Jos, Cluj County; Craiova, Dolj County; Valea Larga, Mures County; Bont, Cluj County; Calarasi, Cluj County; Solona, Salaj County; and Urca, Cluj County. Another church faced unauthorized demolition in Ungheni, Mures County. In Ungheni, the Orthodox Church continued construction of a new church which was being built around the Greek Catholic church.

On May 9, 2006, in Taga, Cluj County, members of the Orthodox Church demolished overnight a rundown Greek Catholic church, despite an injunction issued by the Government forbidding its demolition or the construction of a new church. An ownership lawsuit was ongoing between the Greek Catholic and the Orthodox churches over the property at the time the demolition took place. The Orthodox priest in Taga was fined approximately \$350 (ROL 10 million) for the illegal demolition. Orthodox Church members in Taga were building a new church on the same premises during the reporting period. Following the Greek Catholic complaints, the construction work for the new Orthodox church stopped in June 2006. The Greek Catholic Church also complained to the President's Office about the church's destruction. In Belotint, Arad County, a dilapidated Greek Catholic church also faced imminent demolition after the Orthodox Church repeatedly refused to return it to the Greek Catholics.

In Nicula, Cluj County, the Orthodox Church continued construction close to the famous Greek Catholic Monastery of Nicula, despite a court order to halt any construction. The lawsuit over the ownership of the church has moved slowly since it was filed in 2001. On August 15, 2005, the Greek Catholic Bishop of Cluj-Gherla sent a letter to the prime minister asking for intervention to help preserve the Nicula Monastery. The Greek Catholic Bishop had reportedly not received a reply from the prime minister by the end of the period of this report. A similar case was reportedly developing in Orastie, Hunedoara County, where the Orthodox Church began construction of a building close to the former Greek Catholic church, presumably with the intention of subsequently demolishing the latter. Over the years, the Orthodox Church repeatedly rejected the Greek Catholic requests for alternating services in over 230 localities.

The Special Commission for Restitution, under Law 501/2002, returned to date 318 of the 6,723 properties claimed for restitution by the Greek Catholic Church. Thirty-three of these were returned between July 1, 2005, and June 30, 2006.

In April 2005, Greek Catholic believers in the country and throughout the world redistributed a 2002 memorandum to the state authorities complaining about discrimination against their Church and calling for the restitution of the Greek Catholic churches and other assets confiscated under communist rule. The only reaction by the authorities came from the state secretary for religious denominations, who replied in a letter that the issue of the Greek Catholic churches was complex and sensitive, and that the establishment of the commission for dialogue was a wise solution.

Local and state authorities also ignored numerous letters and appeals complaining about discrimination against the Greek Catholic Church, sent by Greek Catholic bishops and priests over the years. The authorities also did not respond to street protests by Greek Catholics.

Many lawsuits filed by the Greek Catholic Church remained delayed by the courts, often impeded by constant appeals by the Orthodox Church. In November 2005, for example, after a lawsuit that lasted fifteen years, the Court of Appeals ruled in favor of the Greek Catholic Church in its attempt to regain a major church in Bucharest. The Orthodox Church appealed the ruling, but the High Court of Cassation and Justice rejected the appeal on June 15, 2006. The Greek Catholic Church also brought the case to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), which had not issued a decision by the end of the period covered by this report.

Historical Hungarian churches, including Roman Catholic as well as Protestant churches (Reformed, Evangelical, and Unitarian), have received a small number of their properties from the Government. Churches from these denominations were closed but not seized by the communist regime; however, the communist regime confiscated many of these groups' secular properties, which were being used for public schools, museums, libraries, post offices, and student dormitories.

Approximately 80 percent of the buildings confiscated from Hungarian churches are used as public facilities (schools, hospitals, or museums). Of approximately 3,000 buildings confiscated by the communist regime from Hungarian churches, only 33 were restituted by government decrees between 1996 and 2000. However, Hungarian churches could not take possession of all of them because of lawsuits and opposition of current occupants. In the case of the Batthyanaeum Library, the Roman Catholic Church remained unsuccessful in obtaining the return of the building, despite a 2003 favorable court ruling obtained after a five-year lawsuit. The Church filed a complaint with the ECHR right after the issuance of the court ruling, and a decision was still pending. The Roman Catholic Church submitted a complaint to the minister of culture and religious affairs during the winter of 2005, which remained unanswered. During the reporting period, the Roman Catholic Church and the Special Commission for Restitution reportedly began to discuss potential solutions for the restitution of the building before the ECHR rules on the case. The Roman Catholic bishop's palace in Oradea was only partially restituted in 2003, in accordance with an agreement between a local museum, its current user, and the Roman Catholic Bishopric. The museum closed during the period of the report and, in November 2005, the Roman Catholic Church received three more rooms; however, restitution of the remaining portions of the building remained impeded by slow movement of museum holdings to their new location. The Special Commission for Restitution, using Law 501/2002, had restituted in principle 583 of the approximately 2,700 reclaimed buildings to the Hungarian churches, with 195 buildings restored during the period covered by this report. However, Hungarian churches did not regain physical possession of many of these properties. The mayor of Cluj and president of one of the ruling coalition parties reportedly opposed the restitution of three buildings to the Unitarian Church, all of which the Church should have received in December 2004 under the law on religious property. The mayor's office challenged the decisions in court, which ruled in the Unitarian Church's favor. The Unitarian Church took partial possession of one building and was waiting for court papers concerning the other two to be issued.

The Jewish community has received forty-two buildings by government decree. Of these structures, the community took partial or full possession of thirty-six buildings. In many cases, restitution was being delayed by lawsuits. The community was able to reclaim land only in Iasi, where it received fifteen plots of land (of former synagogues and schools) between 1999 and 2000, as well as three additional plots during the period covered by this report. However, eighteen land claims of the Jewish community remained unresolved in Iasi, including a plot of land that, although claimed by the Jewish community in 1998, was divided and distributed to other persons by the prefect. In this case, the county land restitution commission decided to give different plots in compensation for the one that was sold, but the decision was challenged in court by the National Agency of State Domains. Under Law 501/2002, 197 additional buildings had been returned to the Jewish community, of which 142 were restituted during the period covered by this report. The users of ten of the buildings restituted by the Special Restitution Commission challenged the restitution decisions in court, and lawsuits were in progress. During the period covered by this report, the Jewish community obtained one additional building by court ruling.

In 2004, Parliament adopted a law stipulating the restitution of all buildings that belonged to ethnic communities and were confiscated between September 6, 1940, and December 22, 1989. As in the case of religious properties, buildings used for "public interest" will remain in the hands of the present users for either three or five years, depending on the current use of the structure. At the request of the Jewish community, the law extended the period of the confiscation of properties to include the time period between 1940 and 1945, when the pro-Nazi government seized a large number of Jewish properties. By the deadline of September 30, 2004, ethnic communities had submitted 1,930 claims, of which 1,744 belonged to the Jewish community. During the six-month deadline extension for submission of claims ending on January 25, 2006, the number of claims reached 2,156 cases, of which 1,852 belonged to the Jewish community. The new provision regarding compensation for buildings that cannot be returned in kind applies to this law, too. During the reporting period, seventy-nine buildings were restituted under this law.

Another problem with restitution was often a refusal by the occupant to return a property or pay rent for occupancy. The nominal owner can still be held liable for payment of property taxes in such cases.

According to Law 1/2000, which addresses the restitution of farm and forest lands, religious denominations were initially entitled to only a limited amount of land. The new July 2005 legislation, however, greatly increased the scope and number of properties that religious denominations could seek for restitution. When properties cannot be restituted, religious denominations are also eligible for compensation through receipt of comparable properties or shares in the property fund. The Greek Catholic Church complained that, in many regions where it had claimed farm and forest land, local authorities, under the influence of the Orthodox Church, opposed restitution or proposed restitution to all religious denominations in direct proportion to the number of their believers. Such was the case in Moisei, Maramures County, and in Hunedoara and Cluj counties. One parliamentary party belonging to the ruling coalition proposed a bill at the end of 2005 that stipulated

proportional restitution of churches, assets, and land. The Greek Catholic Church separately reported that it could not obtain the return of 40,000 square meters of land in Bucharest because of resistance from the Bucharest mayor's office.

The Orthodox Archbishopric of Suceava and Radauti also complained that the authorities opposed the restitution of 192,000 hectares of forest land to the Orthodox Church Fund of Bucovina, a precommunist foundation. They accused the county land restitution commission headed by the Suceava County prefect of imposing certain conditions that hinder restitution. On May 3, 2006, many priests from the Archbishopric of Suceava participated in a march of silence in Suceava town to protest the authorities' refusal to reconstitute the land.

Amendments to the constitution enacted in October 2003 allow the establishment of confessional schools subsidized by the state. However, this provision was not implemented.

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

#### Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

#### Anti-Semitism

Acts of anti-Semitism, including vandalism against Jewish sites, continued during the period covered by this report. The extreme nationalist press continued to publish anti-Semitic articles. The Legionnaires (also called the Iron Guard, an extreme nationalist, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi group that existed in the country in the interwar period) continued to republish inflammatory books from the interwar period.

In 2003, a contributor to one of the Legionnaire magazines, the Timisoara-based *Gazeta de Vest* (Western Gazette), was sentenced to thirty months' imprisonment for the dissemination of nationalist-chauvinistic propaganda and fascist symbols, a ruling he appealed. In February 2006, after a lengthy lawsuit, he was acquitted.

In 2004, authorities charged an individual with distributing nationalistic-chauvinistic and fascist propaganda; although he received an eighteen-month sentence in prison, the trial was ongoing at the end of the period covered by this report. During a search, the police found a large number of neo-Nazi flyers, magazines, and extreme-right publications in the defendant's home and on his computer.

In February 2005, the Iron Guard monthly *Obiectiv Legionar* (Legionnaire Focus) was distributed in Parliament, where the chairman of the Human Rights Committee of the Senate called for a ban of the magazine. The relevant authorities did not take any action to stop the publication. The magazine, which began publication in 2003, primarily carried old Legionnaire literature and was distributed by a press distribution company, which also distributed another Legionnaire publication, *Cuvintul Legionar* (Legionnaire Opinion), in several of the largest cities, including Bucharest.

In 2004, the metal hood used to cover a Marshal Antonescu statue located in the yard of an Orthodox church in Bucharest was removed and replaced by a tri-color ribbon. The slogan, "Antonescu- national hero," was written on the church wall close by. The perpetrator was not identified. Following complaints by the Jewish community to the authorities, the statue was covered again and the graffiti removed. In September 2005, unidentified individuals again removed the covering, which was eventually put back in place following similar complaints.

In 2004, Nazi and anti-Semitic signs were found on the interior walls of the Jewish cemetery in Sarmasu, Cluj County. Neo-Nazi graffiti were discovered on the door of the home of a member of the Bucharest Jewish community, who filed a complaint with the police. In January 2005, Nazi symbols and anti-Semitic graffiti were found on a building in Suceava inhabited by a married couple that survived the Holocaust. In April 2005, similar symbols were found on a garage in Galati. None of the perpetrators were identified in these cases.

During the first Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2004, some extremists made several attempts to undermine the commemoration and deny the existence of the Holocaust in Romania. During the national electoral campaign in 2004, the extreme nationalist New Generation Party adopted for its electoral campaign a slogan used by the 1930s anti-Semitic Legionnaire Movement: "I swear to God to make Romania into a country like the holy sun in the sky." In 2004, the Organization of Jewish Youth in Timisoara also received threatening and intimidating anti-Semitic messages. The authorities did not react to these cases.

In January 2005, police and prosecutors in Buzau initiated criminal prosecution against a seventeen-year-old male for creating an anti-Semitic website which incited violence against two teenagers of the Jewish community in that town; a decision was pending.

In March 2005, a university professor in Sibiu published an article denying the Holocaust in Romania. In August 2005, the Federation of the Jewish Communities and other Jewish organizations filed a legal complaint with the Prosecutor's Office in Sibiu against the professor for denying the Holocaust. In October 2005, the Prosecutor's Office decided that the professor's action could not be interpreted as a crime as described by the 2002 decree forbidding Holocaust denial. An appeal filed by the Jewish organizations was rejected in November 2005.

In April 2005, unidentified persons vandalized the headquarters of the Jewish community in Focsani, Vrancea County. In May 2005, nine graves were desecrated in a Jewish cemetery in Ploiesti, Prahova County. On May 17, 2005, a synagogue was desecrated in Radauti, Suceava County; nothing was stolen, but the Torah scrolls were vandalized. The Federation of the Jewish Communities notified the state authorities of these incidents.

On July 5, 2005, unidentified persons stole the iron fences surrounding fifty graves and the metal doors of two burial vaults in a Jewish cemetery in Barlad, Vaslui County. In August 2005, a swastika was found on the walls of an old synagogue in Cluj. Perpetrators were not identified.

In October 2005, police began investigating one adult and three juveniles who reportedly drew Nazi symbols on the walls of a synagogue in Targu Mures at the end of September 2005. The police halted the investigation after the suicide of the adult who had been the primary suspect.

The New Right organization (also with Legionnaire orientation) continued to sponsor yearly marches, followed by religious services, to commemorate Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the founder of the Legionnaire Movement. The last march took place in November 2005.

In November 2005, a university professor and Holocaust denier published an anti-Semitic article in Romania Mare, a magazine controlled by the extreme nationalist Greater Romania Party. The article asserted that the country was the target of a Jewish invasion. The Federation of Jewish Communities reacted by filing a criminal complaint and by issuing a statement that urged relevant government institutions to take concrete measures to eradicate anti-Semitism and xenophobia. In January 2006, the police began investigating the professor for nationalist-chauvinistic propaganda.

On November 5, 2005, swastikas and anti-Semitic slogans were found on the walls of a vocational school and a neighboring block of apartments in Suceava. The police identified the perpetrators, and their prosecution began the same month; a decision remained pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

On November 18, 2005, the doors of two synagogues in Dorohoi, Botosani County, were damaged, apparently by vandals.

On January 20, 2006, the police arrested a twenty-year-old for throwing stones at the window of the Jewish Theatre in Bucharest. According to police reports, he was apparently mentally ill and was hospitalized in a specialized clinic.

On March 17, 2006, unidentified individuals stole eight steel poles from the fence of the Jewish cemetery in Sighisoara. On March 24, 2006, unidentified individuals vandalized twenty tombs in the Jewish cemetery in Resita, generating damages amounting to approximately \$45 thousand (35 thousand euros). The Federation of Jewish Communities notified the authorities in these cases, but the perpetrators were not identified.

During the night of May 5, 2006, two minors drew two swastikas on the walls of the Lutheran church in Cluj. The police fined them, and the Lutheran Church also filed a penal complaint, saying that the perpetrators offended a religious denomination. Lutheran Church officials also questioned publicly whether the vandalism was linked to the fact that the government of Israel in 2005 had recognized, post mortem, the efforts of one of the pastors in the parish who hid Jews in the church during Nazi occupation. The case was pending at the end of the period covered by this report.

In May 2006, swastikas and anti-Semitic graffiti appeared on the walls of a house in Bucharest. Perpetrators were not identified.

On June 1, 2006, Vatra Romaneasca (Romanian Hearth) Union, a nationalistic NGO, the Marshal Antonescu League, and the Party of the United Left, a tiny, non-parliamentary party, invited the population to a religious service to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of Antonescu's death. The Federation of Jewish Communities filed a complaint, based on the law punishing racist, xenophobic, pro-Nazi propaganda and banning organizations that disseminate such ideas, against the three sponsors of the event. Police sent the complaint to the Prosecutor's Office of the High Court of Cassation and Justice.

On June 17 and 18, 2006, newly painted swastikas were found on several buildings in downtown Cluj, Cluj County, mostly on ethnic Hungarian-related buildings, including the Reformed church and the Hungarian-language Bathory Istvan High School.

During the reporting period, anti-Semitic views and attitudes were expressed during talk shows broadcast by private television stations Antena 1, National TV, DDTV, and Pro-TV. The television stations failed to respond to any complaints made by the Jewish organizations on this issue.

According to MCA Romania, authorities tended to minimize the significance of such incidents, usually explaining them as being the actions of children, drunkards, or persons with mental disorders.

#### Improvements and Positive Developments in Respect for Religious Freedom

The Government continued to make substantial progress in recognizing and teaching the true history of the Holocaust in Romania. In August 2005, the Government decided to erect a Holocaust memorial in Bucharest and to establish the new Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania. The Institute was officially inaugurated on October 10, 2005. In October 2005, the Government launched the first textbook on the Holocaust in Romania, and commemorated the second annual National Holocaust Remembrance Day with high profile events and speeches throughout the country. The Government commemorated the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Bucharest pogrom in January 2006 and the sixty-fifth anniversary of the Iasi pogrom in June 2006.

Although the pace of restitution remained slow, the Special Commission for Restitution returned several significant buildings to religious denominations. (

In February 2006, the Government issued new regulations regarding religious assistance in penitentiaries. The new regulations allow the free access of all religious groups to prisons.

### Section III. Societal Abuses and Discrimination

There are generally amicable relations among the different religious groups. There is no law against proselytizing. However, the Romanian Orthodox Church repeatedly criticized the "aggressive proselytizing" of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups, which the Church repeatedly described as "sects." This led to conflicts in some cases. The press also reported several cases in which adherents of minority religions were prevented by others from practicing their faith, and local law enforcement authorities did not protect them.

The predominance of the Orthodox Church over the last several hundred years, along with its status as the majority religion, has contributed to its reluctance, in particular at the local level, and sometimes with the support of low-level officials, to tolerate other religions. Consequently, actions by other religious groups to attract members frequently are perceived by the Orthodox Church as attempts to diminish the number of its members. Minority religious groups alleged that some members of the Orthodox clergy provoked isolated incidents of organized group intimidation.

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints complained of repeated harassment and discrimination against its members, including in the workplace. This included incidents where members were threatened with losing their jobs at work or harassed by colleagues because of their religious affiliation. There were also reported incidents where children were reportedly forced by teachers at school to declare their faith and then were harassed. According to the Church's reports, its missionaries were repeatedly and consistently the subject of harassment and violence. In September 2005, four individuals in Constanta reportedly physically assaulted two missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and threatened to kill one of them at knifepoint. Police intervened, and one perpetrator was reportedly fined. In November 2005, two Mormon missionaries were physically assaulted in Iasi, Iasi County, by an individual who tried to push them down a flight of stairs and hit one of them with a bottle. The police intervened, and the perpetrator was charged with assault. The court fined the perpetrator and required an official apology. On May 7, 2006, two Mormon missionaries were assaulted and injured by a man in Bucharest. The police fined the individual approximately \$70 (ROL 2 million).

The Jehovah's Witnesses continued to allege verbal and physical abuse, in particular by some Orthodox priests, and indifference from some police. In some instances, the priests reportedly had the support of local authorities and the police, such as in Dofteana, Bacau County, where, in 2004, the mayor, apparently under influence of the Orthodox priest, obstructed activities of the Jehovah's Witnesses and warned them to cease their door-to-door ministry. In January and March 2005, the Jehovah's Witnesses were physically assaulted by some residents of Dofteana, and the police did not protect them. On February 4, 2006, two members of the Jehovah's Witnesses were assaulted by an Orthodox priest. When they filed a complaint with the local police, the policemen purportedly warned them to not return to Dofteana.

The Jehovah's Witnesses also reported verbal and physical abuse by an Orthodox priest and two individuals, all of them allegedly drunk, in Focsani, Vrancea County, on August 11, 2005. Police fined the three individuals. Similar alleged physical abuse against a group of Jehovah's Witnesses by an Orthodox priest occurred several times in Breasta, Dolj County, in November and December 2005. Police in Breasta allegedly ignored the complaints filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses.

In February 2006, in Topile, Iasi County, an Orthodox priest and a group of drunk individuals allegedly assaulted with clubs a group of Jehovah's Witnesses. Orthodox priests also physically assaulted members of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Lupcina, Suceava County, on February 25, 2006; in Branesti, Gorj County, on March 26, 2006; and in Cosereni, Ialomita County, on April 2, 2006. Police did not take any measures against the assailants.

In the small town of Mizil, Prahova County, the local Orthodox church reportedly continued a persistent discrediting campaign against a small congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. The mayor, along with Orthodox priests and the police, continued an anti-Jehovah's Witnesses campaign that began in 1997 in an attempt to stop the church's activity in Mizil. In 2004, despite repeated complaints filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses, the mayor issued a resolution forbidding any actions of proselytizing. In April 2005, the CNCD reprimanded school authorities and the mayor of Mizil for harassing and discriminating against a Jehovah's Witnesses teacher who was also told by the school director that he would be dismissed. The mayor alleged that the teacher was proselytizing in school and that two school inspectors forced him to choose between his faith and his job. In April 2005, the CNCD also fined the mayor approximately \$220 (ROL 6 million) for publishing discriminatory articles against the Jehovah's Witnesses in the city hall's monthly publication. The city hall and the two inspectors challenged the CNCD decisions, and on November 16, 2005, the Mizil court of first instance ruled in their favor based on a procedural flaw and eliminated the fine; however, the CNCD decision of discrimination remained valid.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported similar incidents with Orthodox priests in several localities, including Milas, Bistrita Nasaud County, in 2004 and 2005, and other localities with smaller congregations. In Pitesti, Arges County, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had problems for several years with an Orthodox priest who repeatedly took and broke the missionaries' name tags, and destroyed religious pamphlets they were carrying.

The Baptist Church reported that, during the period covered by the report, the Baptist community of Satu Mare and Oradea counties filed a formal complaint regarding a group of individuals who repeatedly disrupted the Baptist religious services in Botiz, Satu Mare County. Local police allegedly did not intervene, claiming they could not take action against the perpetrators in the absence of a specific court order.

The Reformed Church in Oradea repeatedly complained that local authorities incited an interconfessional and interethnic conflict by allocating a sports playground which had, according to the Reformed Church, rightfully belonged to a reformed high school, to a local Orthodox parish in 2004. The local Orthodox parish intensified the conflict by locking up the playground, restricting access to the students, and leaving the high school in a state of de facto limbo. The Reformed Church responded by filing complaints to the local authorities and sponsoring several peaceful protests. The case remained unresolved at the end of the period covered by the report.

Minority religions credibly complained about the intolerant attitude of some Orthodox religion teachers, who in some instances have depicted non-Orthodox churches to students as "sects" and a danger to all who might wish to join them. According to a December 2005 incident reported by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, an Orthodox priest threw an Adventist translation of the Bible to the back of the classroom during a religion class in Piatra Neamt, Neamt County, and asked the grade school students to kick it.

In February 2006, Orthodox priests disrupted healthcare events organized by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Tarzia-Brusturi, Dragomiresti, and Razboieni, all in Neamt County.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church continued to complain 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 in isolated sections of the cemetery or if non-Orthodox religious services were not used. During the reporting period, such incidents were reported in Lipanesti, Prahova County; Jiblea, Valcea County; Cojasca, Dambovita County; Garbesti, Iasi County; and Ceahlau, Neamt County. To avoid such encounters, the Adventist Church asked the mayors' offices several years ago for land for cemeteries in a large number of localities where it had congregations, but it received positive answers to only 13 of its 700 requests. During the reporting period, the Seventh-day Adventist Church received a piece of land for cemetery use in Tecuci, Galati County. Orthodox priests also denied access for Greek Catholics to many cemeteries, such as those in Sapanta, Maramures County; Salva, Bistrita Nasaud County; Lucaceni, Satu Mare County; Pesceana, Valcea County; Ungheni, Mures County; Telec-Bicaz, Neamt County; Damuc, Neamt County; Bicaz-Chei, Neamt County; Magina, Alba County; Radesti, Alba County; and Vintu de Jos, Alba County. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints also complained of being constantly denied access to cemeteries.

According to the local Muslim community, Bucharest city hall failed to respond to repeated requests by the Muslim community for land for a Muslim cemetery. This has led to difficulties in locating a proper burial ground for Romanian Muslims. During the period covered by the report, the city hall offered to allocate a plot that was insufficient in size. The Muslim community renewed its request and a decision remained pending. In June 2006, the mufti, official head of the Muslim community, wrote a letter to both the president and the prime minister complaining of the situation.

In January 2005, when a group of villagers, along with the Orthodox priest, switched to the Greek Catholic faith in Pesceana, the village's local council illegally forbade the registration of a Greek Catholic parish and the activities of the Greek Catholic church in the village. Police did not react to the Greek Catholics' complaints of verbal and physical abuse by Orthodox villagers and their priest. The local police chief was subsequently dismissed. An agreement mediated by the state secretary for religious denominations in May 2005 was disregarded by both parties soon after its signature. Following a complaint by a group of NGOs, the CNCD decided that the local council's decisions were discriminatory and reprimanded it at the end of August 2005. Tensions continued, however, during the entire period covered by this report. The situation was aggravated further when the Greek Catholic priest and the church's members were repeatedly denied access to the local cemetery. A court ruling on January 19, 2006, allowing the Greek Catholic priest to enter the cemetery was appealed by the Orthodox Church, and the lawsuit remained ongoing. In April and May 2006, the mayor's office of Pesceana refused to issue a construction permit for a Greek Catholic church, asking the Greek Catholic parish to meet the requirements of Decree 177/1948, the communist religion law. The Greek Catholic Church also complained of the hostile attitude of the prefect of Valcea County toward the Greek Catholic congregation in Pesceana and of the illegal transfer by the local council of two communal cemeteries to the Orthodox Church.

A Greek Catholic Association complained to the minister of the administration and interior of the negative attitude of some prefects-such as those from Valcea and Satu Mare, and the Maramures and Alba counties-towards the Greek Catholic Church.

In January 2006, the decision of more than one hundred people to switch from the Orthodox to the Greek Catholic Church in Stei, Hunedoara County, also generated tensions. The Greek Catholic Church could not obtain possession of the rectory restituted in 2004 because the Orthodox Church appealed a restitution decision that had been in favor of the Greek Catholics. The Greek Catholics were also denied access to the only church in the village, which was Greek Catholic before the communist period. The Greek Catholic Church asked the Secretariat to mediate its dialogue with the Orthodox Church concerning alternative service in the church.

In April 2006, a similar situation occurred in Valea de Jos, Bihor County, when 350 of the approximately 400 villagers, together with the priest, decided to join the Greek Catholic faith and attempted to keep a church they had previously built.

Representatives of minority religions credibly complained that only Orthodox priests grant religious assistance in hospitals, children's homes, and shelters for the elderly. Charitable activities carried out by other churches in children's homes and shelters were often negatively interpreted as proselytizing. In one instance, an Orthodox priest forbade residents of a state-owned orphanage, including some young adults over age eighteen, from attending non-Orthodox religious services unless they were prepared to live elsewhere. He also hindered efforts by religious charities to visit that orphanage. In many cases, minority religions felt compelled to form nonreligious associations in order to gain access to public institutions to carry out charitable activities.

In April 2006, the New Right, an extreme-right xenophobic organization, developed a campaign in Cluj about "the danger" represented by "proselytizing sects." The organization distributed thousands of leaflets and confronted hundreds in an attempt to curb the increasing activity in the country of such "sects" that aimed at "destroying Orthodox Christianity."

Since the dialogue between the Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches came to a halt in 2004, disputes between the two religions' believers over church property increased in intensity. Greek Catholic communities decided, in many cases, 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, their efforts were hampered by the Orthodox Church, sometimes with the support of local authorities. In Sapanta, Maramures County, the Greek Catholic Church decided to give up claims for its church and build a new one. For the last three years, however, the local council, under the influence of the Orthodox priest, refused to issue a construction permit. The Greek Catholic Church initiated a lawsuit. Similar tensions continued in Certeze, Satu Mare County, where the Greek Catholic Church was not permitted to build a new church on its land because of obstructions and harassment

by the Orthodox Church and local authorities. Tensions continued in localities where the Orthodox Church refused to enforce court rulings that ordered restitution of churches to the Greek Catholic Church: Lupsa in Cluj County and Bogdan Voda in Maramures County were two examples. In Bogdan Voda, Maramures County, the Orthodox priest consistently refused to hand over the church that the Greek Catholic Church won in court in 2000.

In Prunis, Cluj County, where most of the residents belong to the Greek Catholic Church, tensions continued because of a long-standing lawsuit.

In Ardud, Satu Mare County, the Greek Catholic Church, which previously had owned the only church in the locality, built a new church to put an end to the long-standing conflict. However, the Orthodox Church took legal action and evicted the Greek Catholic priest (who had been an Orthodox priest) from the parish house in 2003 in the presence of numerous gendarmes and police. The Orthodox Church refused the Greek Catholics' proposal to help buy a new house for the Orthodox priest. During the period covered by this report, tensions came to an end in Ardud after the construction of a new house by the Greek Catholic Church for its priest.

In most localities with two churches (one of which had belonged to the Greek Catholic Church) and only one Orthodox priest, priests frequently do one of three things: hold alternate religious services between the two locations, keep the Orthodox church locked and hold the services in the former Greek Catholic churches, or establish a second Orthodox parish in the locality. However, more than eighteen former Greek Catholic churches remained closed.

On February 17, 2006, in Satu Mare, after sixteen years of lawsuits and delays, authorities enforced a ruling restituting a cathedral to the Greek Catholic Church.

In Dumbraveni, Sibiu County, the Orthodox Church continued to refuse to enforce a previous court ruling to share a local church with the Greek Catholic Church. Although the Orthodox Church promised to return the Greek Catholic church after it completed the construction of a new Orthodox church, it refused to do so after the construction was over.

#### Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. government actively discusses religious freedom issues with the Government and maintained active public outreach on the issue as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The embassy also maintained close contact with a broad range of religious groups in the country, including the Islamic faith, and many minority religions. The ambassador and other embassy representatives regularly met with religious leaders and government officials who work on religious affairs in Bucharest and in other cities.

Throughout the period covered by the report, embassy representatives and other U.S. government officials discussed with government officials at multiple levels the importance of full official recognition of the Holocaust in Romania, improvements in Holocaust education in school curricula, and implementation of the recommendations of the Wiesel Commission. The embassy supported visiting delegations focusing on issues related to the Holocaust, including the Wiesel Commission. Embassy personnel and visiting U.S. officials repeatedly discussed the Holocaust in Romania with local and international members of the Wiesel Commission and supported the work of the commission. Among many other events, the charge d'affaires and other U.S. officials participated in the commemoration of Romania's National Holocaust Day in October 2005. In January 2006, the ambassador and other embassy personnel participated in events commemorating the anniversary of the Bucharest pogrom in Bucharest. In May 2006, the ambassador and the deputy director of the U.S. Department of State's Office of Holocaust Issues publicly addressed a roundtable at the Elie Wiesel Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania. In July 2005, the embassy financed the travel of two high school teachers to a course in the United States on teaching the Holocaust. The embassy also supported activities of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in the country.

On repeated occasions, the ambassador and other embassy officials raised concerns about the slow restitution of religious properties, particularly of Greek Catholic churches, with government officials, including the president, prime minister, and the minister of culture and religious affairs. Members of the embassy's office in Cluj had meetings with Reformed, Evangelical, Greek Catholic, Jewish, and Orthodox officials in Cluj and Oradea, and discussed restitution of religious properties. U.S. officials continued to lobby in government circles for fair treatment on property restitution issues, including religious and communal properties, and for nondiscriminatory treatment of all religious groups.

Embassy and other U.S. government officials also continuously expressed concern to officials and encouraged revision of a government-sponsored draft law on religion, which included numerous elements that would inhibit the freedom of religion. The embassy approached the Government at all levels on this issue, including parliamentarians, presidential experts, the minister of culture and religious affairs, the prime minister, and the president. In July 2005, the ambassador sent a letter expressing clear concerns about the draft law to the minister of culture and religious affairs. The U.S. Congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, commonly called the Helsinki Commission, expressed its concerns regarding the draft religion law in letters to the presidents of the relevant commissions of the Senate in October 2005, and of the Chamber of Deputies in March 2006. Helsinki Commission members also expressed concern directly to senior Romanian officials in Washington and Bucharest.

The embassy sponsored conferences on religious freedom in October 2005 and April 2006.

In addition, embassy staff members were in frequent contact with numerous NGOs that monitor developments in the country's religious life. U.S. officials continued to advocate in government circles for fair treatment on property restitution issues, including religious and communal properties, and for nondiscriminatory treatment of all religious groups.

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