

2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: Romania

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits restricting freedom of conscience and belief, as well as forcing an individual to espouse a religious belief contrary to the individual's convictions. It stipulates all religions are independent from the state, and religious groups have the freedom to organize "in accordance with their own statutes." According to the law on religious freedom and religious denominations, the state recognizes the "important role" of the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the history of the country, but it also recognizes the role of "other churches and denominations." The law specifies a three-tiered classification of religious organizations: religious denominations, religious associations, and religious groups.

In March, the ROC demolished a Greek Catholic church in the town of Ungheni, central Transylvania, despite protests from Greek Catholic Church leadership to the government. In June, the town of Darmanesti removed a monument and Orthodox-style crosses that were illegally built in a World War I cemetery on top of the graves of Catholic Hungarian soldiers. There were continued reports of the slow pace of restitution of confiscated properties, especially to the Greek Catholic Church and the Jewish community. In January, the government declared a church located on the site of a Greek Catholic monastery in Bixad, Northern Transylvania, public domain and decided to allow the ROC to use the church. Although implementing regulations to officially prioritize property restitution cases for Holocaust survivors remained pending, the National Authority for Property Restitution (NAPR) approved priority status for 164 applications.

Greek Catholic civic group ACUM (the word "now" in Romanian) reported that in some cases teachers discriminated against Greek Catholic students and pressured them to take religion classes taught according to the ROC faith. In August, the Ministry of Education approved the syllabus for the compulsory high school course "History of Jews: The Holocaust" and authorized its teaching starting with the 2023-2024 school year. Throughout the year some local authorities renamed streets originally named after persons convicted of Nazi-era war crimes or crimes against humanity. Others continued to allow old names of streets, organizations, schools, and libraries honoring persons convicted of Nazi-era war crimes or crimes against humanity. Some elected representatives of far-right parties gave speeches, made statements, or held events honoring convicted fascist war criminals.

According to some non-Orthodox religious groups, Romanian Orthodox priests again prevented them from conducting burials in Romanian Orthodox or public cemeteries. ACUM stated Romanian Orthodox priests pressured the families of deceased Greek Catholics to bury their dead according to ROC rituals. Representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reported Romanian Orthodox priests sometimes disrupted Seventh-day Adventist funerals. Representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and several religious associations asserted that local Romanian Orthodox priests incited hatred against religious minorities during church services throughout the country. ROC officials continued to reconsecrate places of worship previously owned by the Greek Catholic Church and transferred to the ROC in 1948. According to the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania (Wiesel Institute), several ROC clergy members glorified members of the Legionnaire Movement (the country's fascist organization established between the two world wars) during commemorative religious ceremonies. On September 21, unknown persons painted several swastikas and antisemitic messages on the walls of a synagogue in the city of Timisoara. Material promoting antisemitic views, glorifying Legionnaires, and messages promoting Holocaust denial and relativism, continued to appear on the internet.

U.S. Embassy officials continued to advocate improved property restitution processes and respect for religious diversity with government officials. During a trip to Bucharest in October, the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues encouraged the government to facilitate survivor benefits for U.S.-based victims of the Romanian Holocaust and to continue countering rising antisemitism and condemning acts of Holocaust distortion, particularly the glorification of Nazi-era war criminals by far-right political parties. Throughout the year, embassy officials met with several members of the Interministerial Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism, Xenophobia, Radicalization, and Hate Speech to discuss measures to counter antisemitism and enhance Holocaust education. Embassy officials also discussed with the Wiesel Institute ways to improve Holocaust-related education and to support the establishment of the Museum of Jewish History and the Holocaust. Embassy officials continued to discuss with Muslim and Jewish leaders ways of promoting respect for religious diversity and curbing religious discrimination. The Ambassador met with representatives of the ROC, Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic churches, and the Muslim community to discuss issues of religious freedom, tolerance, and interreligious relations. Using social media, the embassy emphasized respect for religious freedom, stressed the importance of combating antisemitism, and paid tribute to Holocaust victims.

Section I.

Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 18.3 million (midyear 2023). According to a 2021 government census, ROC adherents constitute 73.6 percent of the population and Roman Catholics 3.9 percent. According to the census, there are approximately 115,000 Greek Catholics, however, Greek Catholics estimate their numbers at 488,000. According to leaders of several religious denominations, the results of the census do not accurately reflect the country's religious demography because relevant data about approximately 2.65 million persons is not available. According to the Greek Catholic Church, since the time of the census, a significant number of persons whose Greek Catholic families were forced to convert during the Communist regime rediscovered their roots and joined the Greek Catholic Church. Other religious groups include Old Rite Russian Christians; Protestants, including Reformed Protestants, Pentecostals, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Evangelical Lutherans, and Evangelical Augustans; Jews; Muslims; Jehovah's Witnesses; Baha'is; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Zen Buddhists; the Family (God's Children); the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church); the Church of Scientology; and the International Society of Krishna Consciousness. Atheists and nonbelievers represent less than 1 percent of the population.

According to the 2021 census, Old Rite Russian Christians are mainly located in Moldavia and Dobrogea. Of the approximately 58,300 Muslims counted in the 2021 census, more than 36,700 live in the southeast, near Constanta. Most Greek Catholics reside in Transylvania. Protestants of various denominations and Roman Catholics reside primarily in Transylvania. Orthodox and ethnic Ukrainian Greek Catholics live mostly in the north. Orthodox ethnic Serbs are primarily in Banat. Members of the Armenian Apostolic Church are concentrated in Moldavia and the south. Virtually all members of the Protestant Reformed and Unitarian Churches of Transylvania are ethnic Hungarians. More than half of the Roman Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Transylvania are composed of ethnic Hungarians. Approximately 36 percent of the country's Jewish population of 2,700 resides in Bucharest.

Section II.

Status of Government Respect for Religious Freedom

LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The constitution prohibits restricting freedom of thought, opinion, conscience, or religious beliefs, as well as forcing individuals to espouse a religious belief contrary to their convictions. It stipulates all religions are independent from the state and have the freedom to organize “in accordance with their own statutes” under terms defined by law. The law on religious freedom and religious denominations specifies the state’s recognition of the “important role of the Romanian Orthodox Church,” as well as the role of “other churches and denominations as recognized by the national history” of the country.

The provisions of the law devoted to religion stipulate a three-tier system of religious classification, with “religious denominations” at the highest level, followed by “religious associations” and “religious groups” at the most basic level. Organizations in the top two tiers are legal entities, while religious groups are not. Civil society associations established under separate provisions of the law governing associations and foundations may also engage in religious activities and have the status of legal entities.

The constitution states religious denominations shall be autonomous and enjoy state support, including the facilitation of religious assistance in the army, hospitals, penitentiaries, retirement homes, and orphanages. Only clergy members of recognized religious denominations may be hired by the government as military or prison chaplains. Regulations state clergy members of religious associations may be granted access to prisons on a case-by-case basis in certain conditions. There are no similar regulations for religious groups. The law forbids public authorities or private legal entities from asking individuals to specify their religion, except for the census.

By law, there are 18 religious organizations recognized as “religious denominations,” all of which were in existence at the time the law on religion was enacted in 2006: the ROC, Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara, Roman Catholic Church, Greek Catholic Church, Old Rite Russian Christian (Orthodox) Church, Reformed (Protestant) Church, Christian Evangelical Church, Romanian Evangelical Church, Evangelical Augustan Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Unitarian Church, Baptist Church, Pentecostal Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Federation of Jewish Communities, Muslim Denomination (Islam), and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

Additional organizations seeking recognition as religious denominations must demonstrate 12 years of continuous activity after 2006. A religious association is then eligible to apply for the status of religious denomination if it has a membership of at least 0.1 percent of the population as counted in the most recent census (i.e., approximately 19,000 persons per the 2021 census).

The law defines a religious association as an organization of at least 300 citizens who share and practice the same faith and has attained legal status through registration with the Registry of Religious Associations in the office of the clerk of the court where the main branch of the association is located. To register, religious associations must submit to the government their founding members’ personal data (e.g., names, addresses, personal identification numbers, and signatures), which the law says the government may not share with other public institutions or use in any other way. To operate as religious associations, organizations also require approval from the National Secretariat for Religious Denominations, which is under the authority of the Office of the Prime Minister.

The law defines a religious group as a group of individuals sharing the same beliefs. Religious groups do not have to register to practice their religion, including in public, and do not need approval from the national secretariat to operate.

Civil society associations engaged in religious activities function like secular associations and foundations; however, they do not receive the same benefits as religious denominations or religious associations. These associations do not require approval from the National Secretariat for Religious Denominations to operate. Their registration falls under the provisions of law governing the establishment of foundations, associations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), which require a minimum membership of three individuals. Such civil society associations are not required to submit members' personal data.

Under the constitution, each of the country's 18 recognized ethnic minorities, including Jews, who in some laws are categorized as an ethnic group and in others as a religious group, is entitled to a representative in the Chamber of Deputies. For a deputy to be elected, however, an organization is required, to receive votes equal to 5 percent of the national average number of votes cast by district and any citizen, regardless of religious affiliation, may vote for them. The list of organizations that benefit from these provisions is limited to those belonging to the National Council of Minorities, which consists of organizations already in parliament.

Religious denominations are eligible for state financial and other support. They have the right to teach religion classes in public schools, receive government funds to build places of worship, pay clergy salaries partially with state funds, broadcast religious programming on radio and television, and apply for broadcasting licenses for their own stations. Under the law, the amount of state funding a denomination receives is determined by the number of adherents reported in the most recent census, as well as by "the religious denomination's actual needs," which the law does not define.

Religious associations do not receive government funding and do not have the right to teach religion in public schools, but both they and religious denominations receive tax exemptions on income and buildings used for religious, educational, or other social purposes. Religious groups do not receive either government funding or tax exemptions.

Both religious denominations and religious associations may own or rent property, publish or import religious literature, proselytize, establish and operate schools or hospitals, own cemeteries, and receive tax exemptions on income and buildings used for religious, educational, or other social purposes. Religious groups have no legal status to engage in such activities

Civil society associations engaged in religious activities may engage in religious worship and own cemeteries. While they do not receive the same tax exemptions or other benefits granted to religious denominations and religious associations, they may receive the tax advantages and other benefits accruing to civil society associations and foundations.

Legal provisions allow local authorities to fund places of worship and theological schools belonging to religious denominations, including providing funding for staff salaries and building maintenance, renovation, and conservation or construction of places of worship. The government funds theological schools through the same mechanism available for other preuniversity schools. No similar provisions exist for religious associations or other associations engaged in religious activities; however, these associations may receive funding through legal provisions for civil society associations and foundations.

The law allows all types of religious organizations to bury their dead in cemeteries belonging to other religious organizations, except for cemeteries belonging to Jewish and Muslim communities. By law, non-Muslims and non-Jews are not entitled to be buried in Jewish or Islamic cemeteries. Public cemeteries must have separate sections for each religious denomination if requested by the denominations operating in the locality.

The law allows clergy from recognized religious denominations to minister to military personnel. Clergy may function within the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, Intelligence Service, Foreign Intelligence Service, Protection and Guard Service, Special Telecommunications Service, and General Directorate for Penitentiaries. Under various other arrangements, clergy of recognized religious denominations, and in some cases religious associations, may enter hospitals, orphanages,

and retirement homes to undertake religious activities. Religious denominations and religious associations may undertake activities in penitentiaries, subject to approval by the institution's director.

The law provides for the restitution of religious properties confiscated between 1940 and 1989, i.e., during World War II and the ensuing Communist regime, if the properties are in the possession of the state.

Under the law, if a confiscated property is used "in the public interest," such as for a school, hospital, or museum, and is returned to its previous owner, the current occupants are allowed to remain in it for 10 years after the restitution decision and pay a capped rent. The law does not address the general return of properties currently used as places of worship by another religious group.

A separate statute on the reinstatement of the Greek Catholic Church regulates the restitution of properties to the church from the ROC. Restitution decisions are made by a joint commission representing the two churches and based on "the will of the believers from the communities that possess these properties." The Greek Catholic Church may pursue court action if attempts to obtain restitution of its properties through dialogue are unsuccessful.

The law establishes a points system of compensation in cases where in-kind property restitution is not possible. Religious groups may use the points only to bid on other properties in auctions organized by the National Commission for Real Estate Compensation (NCREC). The NCREC also validates compensation decisions of other local or central authorities, including those of the Special Restitution Commission (SRC), which decides on restitution claims filed by religious denominations and national minorities. The law establishes a 240-day deadline by which claimants must submit additional evidence in their cases at the specific request of the entity in charge of resolving their restitution claim. If a claimant does not meet the deadline, the administrative authority may reject the case. The authority may extend the deadline by an additional 120 days if the claimants prove they made a concerted effort to obtain evidence, usually held by other state authorities, but were unable to do so.

The law nullifies forced "donations" of Jewish property during World War II and the Communist era and lowers the burden of proof for the previous owners or their heirs to obtain restitution. The law designates the Federation of Jewish Communities of Romania as the legitimate inheritor of forfeited communal Jewish property and accords priority to private claims by Holocaust survivors. The law does not address heirless or unclaimed property left by Holocaust victims. According to the country's various civil codes adopted from 1939 on, heirless property and unclaimed property devolves to the government.

The law prioritizes compensation to Holocaust survivors for immovable properties confiscated during the Communist regime. Under the law, NAPR must make a one-time compensation payment to successful claimants who are Holocaust survivors, as opposed to other claimants who receive compensation in several tranches over a period of five years. The law expands access to prioritized processing of claims by persons residing outside the European Union who can prove their status as Holocaust survivors with documents issued by an entity designated by the government of their country of residence.

Romanian and foreign citizens persecuted based on ethnic criteria between 1940 and 1945, defined in the law to include Jews, are entitled to a monthly pension. The amount of the pension varies depending on the type and length of persecution endured. The pension is available to survivors and their families who are no longer citizens, thus entitling foreign citizen Holocaust survivors and foreign citizen family members of Holocaust victims to the same benefits as Romanian citizens. Applicants are required to submit official documents issued by Romanian or foreign government authorities and the International Committee of the Red Cross to prove Holocaust survivor status. The government does not accept certification from the U.S.-based Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany as proof of Holocaust survivor status, despite requests made by the World Jewish Restitution Organization and the recommendation of the U.S. government.

The law allows Holocaust survivors residing in foreign countries and who are eligible for compensation in Romania to prove they were victims of racial and ethnic persecution based on official documents released by institutions of the country of residence. The law exempts Holocaust survivors residing in foreign countries from having to physically submit their applications for compensation at the pension offices in Romania and allows them to use other means of communication, such as electronic mail or express mail, to apply.

By law, children of Holocaust victims and survivors are eligible for monthly compensation. The law also applies to persons who do not have Romanian citizenship or do not reside in the country.

By law, religious education is optional in both public and private schools. Each of the 18 legally recognized religious denominations is entitled to offer religion classes, based on its own religious teachings, in all schools. The Ministry of Education drafts the religious education curriculum for religious education in cooperation with all religious denominations to ensure the accuracy of the teachings. A denomination may offer classes regardless of the number of students adhering to the denomination in a school. The law allows for exceptions where the right of students to attend religion classes cannot be implemented “for objective reasons,” without specifying what these reasons may be.

Because participation in religion classes is optional, parents of students younger than 18 must request their children’s enrollment in religion classes, while students 18 and older may make this request themselves. Students normally take a religious course in their school that is based on the religious teachings of the denomination to which the student belongs. Alternatively, students may opt to take a religion course offered by their denomination outside the school system and submit a certificate to receive academic credit.

Religion teachers in public schools are government employees, but each religious denomination approves the appointment and retention of teachers of its religion classes.

The law forbids proselytizing in public and private schools. If teachers proselytize, the school management determines the appropriate disciplinary action based on the conclusions of an internal committee.

The religion of a child who has turned 14 may not be changed without the child’s consent; after age 14, individuals have the right to choose their religion.

The law bans discrimination on religious grounds in all areas of public life. It also bans religious defamation and generating conflict on religious grounds, as well as public offenses against religious symbols. Penalties may include fines varying from 1,000 to 100,000 lei (\$220 to 22,200), depending on whether the victim is an individual or a community.

The law exempts deceased adherents of Judaism from autopsy upon the request of their families or the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania, provided law enforcement bodies determine there are no suspicious circumstances surrounding their death.

By law, antisemitism is defined as a perception of Jews expressed in the form of anti-Jewish hatred, as well as speech and physical acts motivated by hatred that target Jews or their belongings, Jewish community institutions, or Jewish places of worship. Penalties for publicly promoting antisemitic ideas and doctrines or manufacturing and disseminating antisemitic symbols range from three months’ to three years’ imprisonment and the loss of certain rights such as the right to vote and run for election. Penalties for establishing an antisemitic organization range from three to 10 years in prison and the loss of certain rights.

The law prohibits the establishment of fascist, Legionnaire Movement, racist, or xenophobic organizations, which it defines in part as groups that promote violence, religiously motivated hatred, or extremist nationalism; the law does not define extremist nationalism. Penalties for establishing such organizations range from three to 10 years’ imprisonment and the loss of certain rights. Criminal liability is waived if the person involved in establishing such an organization

informs authorities of the organization before it begins its activity; penalties are halved if the individual assists authorities with the criminal investigation. The law also makes manufacturing, selling, distributing, owning with intent to distribute, and using racist, fascist, xenophobic, and Legionnaire symbols illegal. Penalties range from three months' to three years' imprisonment.

Publicly denying the Holocaust or contesting, approving, justifying, or minimizing it in an "obvious manner" as determined by a judge is punishable by six months' to three years' imprisonment or by a fine, depending on the circumstances, of up to 200,000 lei (\$44,400). Publicly promoting persons convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes is subject to a prison term ranging from three months to three years (and from six months to five years if the offense was committed online). The same penalties apply to publicly promoting antisemitic, fascist, Legionnaire, racist, or xenophobic ideas, worldviews, or doctrines.

The criminal code cites religious motivation, including in acts of murder, assault, and vandalism, as an aggravating factor in a crime. In such cases, courts may impose a more severe penalty upon conviction of that crime. Based on the seriousness of the offense and the aggravating factor of religious motivation, courts have discretion to impose up to an additional one-third of the maximum prison sentence for that crime under the code, not to exceed two additional years of imprisonment. Courts may impose a fine as an alternative to a prison term (but may not impose both) in cases where religious motivation is an aggravating factor, and in such cases may impose up to an additional one-third of the maximum fine provided under the code for that crime.

The law allows religious workers from legally recognized religious organizations to enter and remain in the country under an extended-stay visa. Visa applicants must receive approval from the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs and submit evidence they represent religious organizations legally established in the country. The secretariat may extend such visas for up to five years. There is no quota or other limit on the total number of visas for foreign religious workers.

The country is a party to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

GOVERNMENT PRACTICES

As of year's end, the government had not approved any applications for religious association status, compared with approving four such applications in 2022. As of year's end, 44 entities were registered as religious associations. The religious association Assemblies of God – Romania reported that the government did not grant it religious denomination status despite submitting the required documentation in 2022. The State Secretariat for Religious Denomination reported the decision was delayed because repeated changes in the government impeded the required interagency process and Cabinet decision.

Some small religious groups continued to state they viewed the 300-person membership requirement and the need to submit their founding members' personal data for registration as a religious association as discriminatory because other types of associations required only three members and did not have to submit members' personal data. They again criticized the three-tier classification system for religious organizations, particularly the minimum number of members required, pointing out that some denomination previously registered have fewer members.

Greek Catholics reported that throughout the year, during the commemoration of cultural figures who had been followers of the Greek Catholic Church, local authorities invited ROC representatives to perform religious ceremonies. Representatives of the Greek Catholic civic group ACUM stated that such practices were attempts to "distort" and "confiscate" the religious identity of the commemorated persons.

In March, the ROC demolished a Greek Catholic church in the town of Ungheni, central Transylvania. On March 28, Archbishop Lucian Muresan of the Greek Catholic Church sent a

letter of protest to the Prime Minister. According to Muresan, the church in Ungheni was a spiritual center for Greek Catholics until Communist authorities confiscated and transferred it to the ROC. Greek Catholics stated the government ignored their repeated requests for the restitution of the Ungheni church and their objections to the ROC's efforts to erect a new place of worship.

In June, following a court ruling, the town of Darmanesti removed a monument and Orthodox-style crosses that were illegally built in a World War I cemetery in 2019 on top of the graves of Catholic Hungarian soldiers. The cemetery was the site of 2019 protests and tensions between ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Romanians over the construction of the monument and placement of Orthodox-style crosses. In July, members and supporters of the Calea Neamului (Path of the Nation) and Fratia Ortodoxa (Orthodox Brotherhood) associations, frequently characterized by media as neo-fascist groups, installed new Orthodox-style crosses. Chair of the Harghita County Council Csaba Borboly told the media that the placement of the new crosses affected the graves of Hungarian soldiers. In October, the two organizations held a commemoration of Romanian soldiers allegedly buried in the cemetery and several participants displayed banners inscribed with the message "Hungarians, go back to Mongolia where you came from!"

There were continued reports of the slow pace of restitution of confiscated properties, especially to the Greek Catholic Church and the Jewish community. SRC had approved 52 requests for the restitution of "immovable properties" (land or buildings) to religious denominations, approved compensation in 109 cases, and rejected 54 other claims during the year, compared with 38 approved requests for restitution, 105 approved compensations cases, and 365 rejected claims in 2022. All the claims were submitted before the 2006 deadline. In 9 cases, the filers withdrew their claims. According to data provided by NAPR, the number of cases the SRC reviewed decreased from 530 in 2022 to 224 in 2023.

According to NAPR, religious denominations appealed in courts 35 decisions the SRC issued during the year, compared with 154 in 2022. The Roman Catholic Church made two appeals (five in 2022); the ROC made nine (54 in 2022); the Greek Catholics made five (62 in 2022); the Evangelical Augustinian Church made 12 (eight in 2022); and the Jewish community made six (12 in 2022). Information concerning court decisions on these cases was unavailable. The Romanian Orthodox Church reported the government had returned an estimated 7 percent of all properties confiscated during the Communist regime.

During the year, NAPR reviewed 37 claims submitted by the Greek Catholic Church, compared with 399 claims in 2022. NAPR approved five requests for restitution to the Greek Catholic Church and approved compensation in 19 other cases. Greek Catholic Church officials said NAPR continued to reject their claims because the properties now belonged to the ROC and were subject to a different law, making restitution possible only through a joint commission representing the two Churches and based on "the will of the believers from the communities that possess these properties." During the Communist regime, all places of worship and parish houses were transferred to the ROC, and most other properties (land and buildings) to the state. According to Greek Catholic officials, there was again no progress on forming a joint commission by year's end, a request the Greek Catholic Church made 24 years ago.

The Greek Catholic Church continued to report delays on restitution lawsuits, some of which had been pending for as many as 13 years. Church representatives stated there were no court decisions on Greek Catholic restitution cases again during the year and that in several cases, local government committees in charge of transferring the ownership of certain lands to the Greek Catholic Church following a restitution decision failed to do so. the local government in Targu Lapus refused to enforce a 2015 court decision that returned to the Greek Catholic Church a land lot that had belonged to a Greek Catholic religious school and five hectares (approximately 12 acres) of forest and pasture that had belonged to the local Greek Catholic parish.

In January, the government declared a church located on the site of a Greek Catholic monastery in Bixad, Northern Transylvania, public domain and decided to allow the ROC to use the church. In December 2022, Greek Catholics requested the right to use the building, noting it belonged to the Greek Catholic denomination until it was confiscated in 1948 and that the church building was

located within a Greek Catholic monastery. Part of the monastery site, but not the church building itself, was previously restituted to the Greek Catholic Church by the government following court decisions. The restitution, however, was delayed by a 2016 appeal and competing property claim by the Satu Mare County Council. According to members of the Greek Catholic Church, the council continued to block restitution because it believed the property should remain in ROC hands. At year's end, the case remained pending. In December, the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations reported it started consultations with both the ROC and Greek Catholic Church to find a solution.

Although implementing regulations to officially prioritize property restitution cases for Holocaust survivors remained pending, NAPR approved priority status for 168 such applications. Since the passage of the legislation in 2016, NAPR had awarded compensation to Holocaust survivors in 139 cases, rejected the claims in 13 cases, and not issued a decision in 16 cases at year's end.

The SRC approved 41 pending claims from previous years by the Jewish community – 33 through compensation and eight through restitution – and rejected 10 others, compared with 26 approved during the same period in 2022. In seven other cases, the claimants withdrew their requests. Religious groups continued to state that it was difficult to obtain required documentation from the National Archives demonstrating proof of ownership in time to meet the 120-day deadline to submit an appeal. The Caritatea Foundation, a partnership of the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) and Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania, continued to state the claims procedure was overly bureaucratic because the SRC often requested submission of numerous additional supporting documents that sometimes were located in government-managed archives to which access was difficult, giving Jewish claimants insufficient time to meet the deadline for document submission.

According to the Caritatea Foundation, as of December, the NCREC issued 35 final approvals on compensation decisions during the year. Caritatea stated it challenged six of these decisions because the compensation amounts awarded were significantly lower than the value of confiscated property. As of December, 110 decisions were pending final approval, of which eight had been issued before 2013, according to Caritatea.

According to the Diocese of Transylvania of the Reformed Church, delays continued in addressing its property restitution lawsuits. According to data provided by NAPR, since 2002, the SRC had reviewed 971 of the 1,191 claims submitted by the Reformed Church and had approved 556 requests for compensation or restitution in kind. The Diocese continued to state the government rejected its restitution claims on the grounds the entities registered as the former property owners were educational institutions of the Reformed Church and not the contemporary churches. According to church leaders, the Communist regime had dissolved the former educational institutions while confiscating their property, meaning the former property owners no longer existed as such, but the contemporary churches, as the successors to the dissolved educational institutions, were in effect the same entities whose property the Communist regime had seized. In November the High Court of Cassation and Justice, Romania's supreme court, decided religious denominations have to prove direct ownership of a property or a direct relationship between them and the educational institutions for their restitution claims to be admissible.

According to the Reformed Church of Romania, a criminal investigation against Bishops Istvan Csury and Bela Kato for bribery and use of forged documents remained pending at year's end. The Reformed Church said the investigation was intended to block church property restitution.

The Hungarian Unitarian Church reported delays on compensation and restitution decisions. According to church representatives, throughout the year, the SRC issued several decisions granting compensation for confiscated property, but the NCREC did not review most of those decisions, causing delays, with decisions still pending at year's end.

Twenty claims submitted by the Roman Catholic Church were resolved as of year's end, compared with 16 in 2022. The government granted compensation or restitution in kind in 16 cases and denied four claims, compared with 14 approved and two denied in 2022.

The government approved restitution in kind or compensation in 17 claims submitted by the Reformed Church and denied four others, compared with 18 approved and 18 denied in 2022.

In November, government officials, including Presidential Advisor Segiu Nistor and Ministry of Foreign Affairs State Secretary Traian Hristea, attended and delivered remarks at the inauguration of a new mosque in Bucharest erected with funding received from the government's State Secretariat for Religious Denominations. In their remarks, the officials emphasized the government's respect for religious diversity and the contribution of Romania's Muslim community to the country's development.

In May and October, the government convened a working group consisting of several government agencies, the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania, Caritatea, and the WJRO to expedite processing of remaining property claims and the granting of pensions to Holocaust survivors abroad.

During the year, nearly 73 percent of schoolchildren took religion classes taught by government employees appointed by religious denominations in accordance with each of their faiths. According to some NGOs and parents' associations, in some cases enrollment in religion classes taught according to the Romanian Orthodox faith continued to be the result of pressure by the ROC, as well as the failure of school directors to offer parents alternatives to religion classes.

ACUM reported that in some cases teachers discriminated against Greek Catholic students and pressured them to take religion classes taught according to the ROC faith. Some schools reportedly did not offer Greek Catholic students alternatives to religion classes taught according to the Romanian Orthodox faith. Greek Catholics reported that the teachers' practice of providing Romanian Orthodox textbooks to all first-grade children on the first school day represented a form of pressure.

The education law passed in July 2023 stipulated that the compulsory high school course "History of Jews: The Holocaust" would be taught starting with the 2025-26 school year. In August, Education Minister Ligia Deca approved the syllabus for the course and authorized its teaching starting with the 2023-24 high school year. In October, the government organized a ceremony dedicated to the course rollout attended by Prime Minister Marcel Ciolacu, Education Minister Deca, Silviu Vexler, the member of parliament serving as the designated official representative of the Jewish community, and other government officials. In his remarks, Prime Minister Ciolacu emphasized the importance of the course and its role in consolidating democracy and respect for human rights, and Vexler welcomed the syllabus and the course rollout. Some experts expressed concerns about elements in the syllabus that could lead to Holocaust distortion by focusing on "collective guilt rather than the culpability of individual leaders" and noted that the delayed approval left no time for teacher training before the course rollout.

Following requests from several religious denominations, in May, the education law added religion to the list of possible subjects that high school students could select for the baccalaureate exam. The previous law included only academic subjects (geography, economics, sociology). Religious denominations welcomed the legislation. The National Council of Pupils and other NGOs criticized the new law, stating religion was taught confessionally and individuals' religious values and beliefs could not be assessed and graded.

The government reported all military chaplains continued to be Romanian Orthodox priests, with the exceptions of one Roman Catholic priest and one pastor from the Evangelical Alliance.

According to the NGO Center for Monitoring and Combating Antisemitism in Romania (MCA), prosecution of antisemitic speech and Holocaust denial continued to be infrequent. The MCA continued to state that throughout the years, authorities did not hold individuals who engaged in antisemitic acts legally accountable and that law enforcement bodies failed to prosecute those who committed various acts of vandalism directed against cemeteries, synagogues, and memorials.

According to the Wiesel Institute, throughout the year some local authorities renamed streets originally named after persons convicted of Nazi-era war crimes or crimes against humanity. In February, the local council in the city of Calarasi renamed a street originally named after Constantin Pantazi, a Defense Minister in the WWII Ion Antonescu-led cabinet convicted of war crimes. Nevertheless, media outlets again reported some local authorities continued to allow old names of streets, organizations, schools, and libraries honoring persons convicted of Nazi-era war crimes or crimes against humanity and to allow the display of public statues and busts depicting persons convicted of war crimes. Authorities in Bucharest and Cluj-Napoca allowed streets to remain named after Mircea Vulcanescu, a member of the Antonescu-led cabinet, and Radu Gyr, a prominent member of the Legionnaire Movement.

Following a request by Bucharest Sector 4 City Council, in February, the board of the Mircea Vulcanescu Technological High School in Bucharest discussed renaming the school taking into consideration Vulcanescu's conviction for Holocaust-era war crimes. The board decided to postpone a final decision on the name change. During the meeting, over 100 persons and representatives of several organizations, including Senator Claudiu Tarziu from the far-right Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR), protested the name change in front of the high school. Participants also gave students flyers glorifying Vulcanescu. On April 5, the board reconvened and decided to rename the school "Economic High School Number 1." While Bucharest Sector 4 mayor Daniel Baluta welcomed the decision, several antisemitic organizations criticized it and AUR Senator Tarziu stated his party would rename the high school after Vulcanescu if his party wins the elections in 2024.

On February 15, the senate of the University of Bucharest decided to withdraw an honorary doctorate granted in 1941 to Marshall Antonescu. University of Bucharest Rector Marian Preda stated the decision was motivated by Antonescu's role in the Holocaust.

The Sighet City Hall refused to withdraw the honorary title granted in 2022 to Petru Codrea who, according to the Wiesel Institute, was a member of the Legionnaire Movement.

The Wiesel Institute continued to organize online and in-person educational activities for teachers, students, and police officers; inform the public about the Holocaust; and post teaching materials on the history of the Holocaust in the country on its web page. Throughout the year, the institute posted several graphic novels about local Holocaust history on its webpage and displayed them in exhibitions throughout the country.

The inter-ministerial committee for monitoring the implementation of the two-year national strategy to combat antisemitism, xenophobia, radicalization, and hate speech continued to convene throughout the year. The committee includes representatives of the Jewish community, the B'nai B'rith Forum, and MCA. Throughout the year, members of the committee developed a methodology to assess the risk of antisemitism and xenophobia for vulnerable groups, evaluated the relevant training that police officers received, and analyzed how secondary and higher education programs contributed to combating antisemitism. Following the work of the committee, the Ministry of Interior developed a standard methodology to identify hate crimes and collect relevant data.

ACUM representatives continued to state history textbooks and academic publications distorted or minimized the history of the Greek Catholic Church. ACUM also reported that official websites of central and local government institutions published biased and false information about the Greek Catholic Church. For example, in a historical description of the Greek Catholic Church, the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations discussed on its website the acts of General Adolf Nicolas von Bukow, an Austrian military commander who, following conflicts between Greek Catholics and Orthodox followers in the 18th century, reportedly ordered the destruction of numerous Orthodox churches and monasteries. Greek Catholics reported that this reference in the description of the Greek Catholic Church was historically inaccurate and offensive as it associated their denomination with Bukow's acts. According to ACUM, in most cases local governments did not invite Greek Catholic Church representatives to public events but did invite ROC representatives.

The group also reported government officials deliberately overlooked the religious affiliation of historically important Greek Catholic leaders when commemorating them.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported several public hospitals rejected requests by Seventh-day Adventist employees to take a day off on Saturday.

In October, during the adoption of Romania's Universal Periodic Review at the UN Human Rights Council, the Romanian Secular-Humanist Association and Humanists International called on the government to ensure its national strategy against hate speech included more protected classes. The NGOs' statement recognized the country had made strides on freedom of religion or belief, but expressed disappointment that it failed to adopt a comprehensive national strategy on the protection of the rights of vulnerable groups.

According to media reports, the government provided the majority of funding for the €200 million (\$220 million) construction of the People's Salvation Cathedral in Bucharest, expected to be completed in 2025. Reportedly, the structure will be the largest Orthodox cathedral in the world.

On February 13, AUR Senator Sorin Lavric delivered remarks in the senate praising George Manu, a former commander of the Legionnaire Movement. According to the Wiesel Institute, Lavric's remarks about Manu were part of a series of speeches he delivered in the Senate praising Holocaust-era war criminals, members of the Legionnaire Movement, and pro-Nazi intellectuals.

During an interview published on January 27 by the news website campineanul.ro, Campina city council member Liviu Briciu stated Marshall Antonescu was a hero.

On March 3, the Culture Palace in the city of Ploiesti, an arm of the Ploiesti County council, hosted a cultural event organized by the NGO Fratia Ortodoxa (Orthodox Brotherhood) praising Radu Gyr and Mircea Vulcanescu, both convicted for Holocaust-era war crimes. The county council did not take any action against the NGO despite prior warnings from the Wiesel Institute about the nature of the event.

On March 31, the Valcea County council hosted a cultural event organized by the Ogoranu Foundation dedicated to anticomunist fighters. During the event, speakers praised several members of the Legionnaire Movement and organizers displayed on a projection screen a stylized version of the Legionnaire Movement emblem.

In June, the Palace of Culture in the city of Iasi, an institution subordinated to the Ministry of Culture, cancelled a book-launch event for historian Gica Manole. The Palace of Culture made the decision after media, several academics, MCA, and the Wiesel Institute objected to the event and reported Manole's past attempts to deny the existence of the Holocaust and glorify Holocaust-era perpetrators.

In March 2022, before a performance at the "I. L. Caragiale" National Theater, unknown persons distributed several copies of a newspaper that included antisemitic content. The Ministry of Culture started an internal investigation and notified police about the incident. In September 2023, the National Theater notified law enforcement that the prosecutor's office attached to Bucharest Sector 1 Court dismissed the investigation. According to the government, prosecutors dismissed the case because they considered that the acts did not represent a crime.

On January 27, during a ceremony dedicated to International Holocaust Remembrance Day organized by the Jewish community in Bucharest, Presidential Advisor Catalina Galer delivered remarks on behalf of President Klaus Iohannis paying tribute to Holocaust victims and emphasizing the duty to counter antisemitism and preserve Holocaust memory. Pursuant to its pledge to implement the recommendations of the 2004 Wiesel Commission report, the government again commemorated National Holocaust Remembrance Day on October 9, marking the day when Romanian authorities began deporting the country's Jews to Transnistria. Galer delivered remarks on behalf of President Iohannis emphasizing the importance of providing Holocaust-related

education and combatting antisemitism. The Wiesel Institute held a wreath-laying ceremony at the Holocaust Memorial in Bucharest that several government officials attended.

During the year the government established a working group with NGOs acting on behalf of Holocaust survivors to discuss ways to streamline the process for applying for monthly pensions available to Romanian and foreign citizens persecuted based on ethnic criteria between 1940 and 1945.

The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations continued to provide funding for cultural events organized by religious denominations and for publication of several books on the history and heritage of religious groups in the country.

The country is a member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

Section III.

Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom

According to non-Orthodox religious groups, ROC priests again prevented them from conducting burials in Romanian Orthodox or public cemeteries, including refusing access to the Romanian Orthodox cemetery in Sapanta that previously belonged to the Greek Catholic Church. ROC priests continued to restrict such burials by requiring they take place in isolated sections of a cemetery or following Orthodox rituals. Greek Catholics reported that Romanian Orthodox priests refused to collect taxes from Greek Catholic relatives of persons buried in cemeteries previously owned by the Greek Catholic Church, which could result in the seizure of the gravesites for tax delinquency. As a result, Greek Catholics said they had to lie about their religion or rely on acquaintances who belonged to the Romanian Orthodox faith to keep the gravesites. ACUM stated Romanian Orthodox priests often pressured the families of deceased Greek Catholics to bury their dead according to ROC rituals or tried to prevent Greek Catholic priests from performing the rite of Holy Unction for dying persons.

In several counties located in the historical region of Moldavia, local governments failed to respond to requests by the Seventh-day Adventist Church for permission to conduct burials in the cemeteries. Church representatives reported that in some cases, in counties of Maramures, Iasi, Suceava, and Botosani located in the northeastern part of the country, Romanian Orthodox priests disrupted Seventh-day Adventist funerals.

Representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and several religious associations reported that local Romanian Orthodox priests incited hatred against religious minorities during church services throughout the country.

According to Greek Catholics, some ROC archdioceses continued to distort the history of the Greek Catholic Church in their public messaging. They said that on websites of several Romanian Orthodox deaneries and parishes, the ROC presented historical details about several formerly Greek Catholic churches that the Communist regime had transferred to the ROC without mentioning the churches' Greek Catholic affiliation or that some of their previous priests or founders were Greek Catholic. Greek Catholics also reported textbooks, local government websites and social media pages, as well as some outlets deliberately omitted the previous Greek Catholic affiliation of churches or the adherence of important historical figures to the Greek Catholic Church.

ROC officials continued to reconsecrate places of worship previously owned by the Greek Catholic Church and transferred to the ROC in 1948. Greek Catholics reported that in such cases, ROC representatives removed Greek Catholic relics from the altar without any explanation, with the disposition of the relics undisclosed.

According to the Wiesel Institute, several ROC clergy members glorified members of the Legionnaire Movement during commemorative religious ceremonies. After being notified by the Wiesel Institute about the situation, the ROC Patriarchy reminded several eparchies that the ROC Holy Synod bans clergy from becoming involved in politics.

On September 21, unknown persons painted swastikas and antisemitic messages on the walls of a synagogue in the city of Timisoara. The incident took place after the synagogue hosted a play about a 1938 antisemitic attack by members of the Legionnaire Movement. Police opened a criminal investigation, and the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations condemned the incident.

Material promoting antisemitic views and glorifying Legionnaires as well as messages promoting Holocaust denial and relativism continued to appear on the internet. According to a study released by the Wiesel Institute in July, several articles published online claimed that Jews were behind “an alleged war against Russia started by Ukraine.” According to the same study, most antisemitic hate speech on social media included Holocaust distortion, Jewish conspiracy theories, and a trivialization of National Socialism by associating it with modern day Ukraine or Israel.

On November 16, police detained blogger Catalin Danoiu for 24 hours and started an investigation against him for incitement to hatred and discrimination. Investigators found hundreds of stickers inscribed with the image of Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, the founder of the Legionnaire Movement, and other legionnaire symbols in his house. Danoiu’s blog and other websites known for their antisemitic content posted numerous antisemitic materials with offensive language against Jews following the October 7 Hamas terrorist attack on Israel. MCA reported participants at a November rally in Bucharest in support of Palestine used the slogan “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free,” an antisemitic slogan that implies support for the destruction of the state of Israel.

In December, the Wiesel institute issued the results of a survey of attitudes towards minorities, including Jews, conducted on a nationally representative sample of 1,332 respondents between November 20 and December 4. According to the survey, nine percent of respondents stated Jews represented a threat to the country and eleven percent stated Jews represented a problem, but not a threat. According to the survey, the percentage of those who responded “somewhat agree” or “totally agree” with the following statements were as follows: Jews act to destabilize the society (21 percent, as compared to 22 percent in 2022); Jews should be restricted from certain professions or occupations (26 percent, as compared to 30 percent in 2022); it would be better for Jews to live in their own country (28 percent, as compared to 30 percent in 2022); Jews are only pursuing their own interests (55 percent, as compared to 54 percent in 2022).

During a June soccer match in Bucharest between the Under-21 teams of Romania and Ukraine, Romanian supporters displayed a banner with the message “No step back/Like in the summer of ‘27,” referencing the establishment of the Legionnaire Movement in June 1927.

In April, the Husi court issued a non-final ruling in a civil case forcing three underage suspects and their parents to pay compensation for the 2019 desecration of several graves in the Jewish cemetery in Husi. Criminal charges were dismissed because the statute of limitations had expired. In 2020, the prosecutor’s office of the Vaslui tribunal indicted the three suspects for destroying dozens of headstones in the cemetery.

According to the MCA, online shops continued to sell antisemitic items and books, including *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* and other publications promoting antisemitic messages or Holocaust denial. In February, MCA reported that following its request, two online bookstores stopped selling books that glorified Marshall Antonescu. MCA also reported that in May, a renowned auction house in Bucharest organized an online auction of objects that belonged to Marshall Antonescu. MCA asked authorities to stop the sale of such objects, as it led to the exploitation of Holocaust victims and survivors’ suffering.

Section IV.

U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

U.S. embassy officials continued to advocate improved property restitution processes and respect for religious diversity with government officials. During a trip to Bucharest in October, the U.S. Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues encouraged the government to facilitate survivor benefits for U.S.-based victims of the Romanian Holocaust and to continue countering rising antisemitism and condemning acts of Holocaust distortion, particularly the glorification of Nazi-era war criminals by far-right political parties. Embassy, Labor Ministry, and National Office for Public Pensions officials discussed ways to expedite the granting of pensions to Holocaust survivors living abroad. The Ambassador and embassy officials met several times with Bucharest City Hall officials to raise the importance of the future Museum of Jewish History and the Holocaust.

Throughout the year, embassy officials met with several members of the Interministerial Committee for Monitoring the Implementation of the National Strategy to Combat Antisemitism, Xenophobia, Radicalization, and Hate Speech to discuss measures to counter antisemitism and enhance Holocaust education. The Ambassador and other embassy officials met with the Minister of Education and other Ministry of Education representatives to discuss the introduction of the compulsory Holocaust course in high schools.

Embassy officials also discussed with the Wiesel Institute ways to improve Holocaust-related education and support the establishment of the Jewish history course in high school curriculum and the Holocaust Museum. Embassy officials continued to discuss with Muslim and Jewish leaders ways of promoting respect for religious diversity and curbing religious discrimination. The Ambassador met with representatives of the ROC, Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic churches, and the Muslim community to discuss issues of religious freedom, tolerance, and interreligious relations.

In October, at a ceremony for National Holocaust Commemoration Day held in Bucharest, the Ambassador spoke about the importance of Holocaust education and remembrance and laid a wreath. In the same month, at a ceremony dedicated to the high school Holocaust course rollout, the Ambassador emphasized the role of education in countering antisemitism and Holocaust distortion. In November at a ceremony dedicated to the inauguration of a mosque in Bucharest, the Ambassador highlighted the importance of religious freedom.

Using social media, the embassy emphasized respect for religious freedom, stressed the importance of combating antisemitism, and paid tribute to Holocaust victims.

The embassy also helped organize and sponsored the annual Elie Wiesel Study Tour in July, which provided students the opportunity to travel to historic sites and to understand the political, social, and cultural forces that created the Holocaust.