

[\[Print Friendly Version\]](#)**U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE**[Home](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [FOIA](#) | [Privacy Notice](#) | [Archive](#) | [Search](#)[About the State Department](#) | [Press & Public Affairs](#) | [Travel & Living Abroad](#)
[Countries & Regions](#) | [International Topics & Issues](#) | [History, Education & Culture](#)
[Business Center](#) | [Other Services](#) | [Employment](#)**Romania****International Religious Freedom Report**Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor
October 2001

The Constitution provides for religious freedom; while the Government generally respects this right in practice, there are some restrictions and several minority religious groups continued to claim credibly that low-level government officials and the Romanian Orthodox clergy impeded their efforts at proselytizing, as well as 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. Government registration and recognition requirements still pose obstacles to minority religions. Following the accession to power of the left-center Party of Social Democracy of Romania (PDSR) in December 2000, reorganization and staffing of the new Government put on hold many religious initiatives. While the new Government eased distinctions between types of places of worship that could be constructed by recognized and unrecognized religions, new requirements for construction of these churches may make the process more difficult for minority religions. Progress on restitution of properties slowed under the PDSR Government. In February 2001, the PSDR Government sent to the 15 recognized religions for comment a highly controversial draft bill on religious denominations, which the previous Government had withdrawn in February 2000 after strong objections by non-Orthodox religious groups and human rights groups. Most minority religious groups reiterated their critical views of the bill. The Government made little progress on restitution of religious properties and has made more cumbersome the process of obtaining permission to erect new churches for non-Orthodox religious denominations.

There are generally amicable relations among the different religious groups; however, the Romanian Orthodox Church has shown some hostility towards non-Orthodox religious churches, and criticized the "aggressive proselytizing" of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups, which the Church has repeatedly described as "sects." Opposition by the Romanian Orthodox Church to the restitution of religious property to other religious groups, especially Greek Catholic churches, remains a problem.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The Embassy has met with the Government and religious leaders to encourage respect for religious freedom, pressed strongly against the proposal of the draft religion bill, and urged the restitution of religious property seized under the Communists.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has a total area of roughly 91,799 square miles and its population is approximately 22.4 million.

The Romanian Orthodox Church is the predominant religion in the country. The Government officially recognizes 15 religions: the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Old Rite Christian Church, the Reformed (Protestant) Church, the Christian 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, the Mosaic denomination, and the Muslim denomination. However, members of other faiths worship freely. According to the 1992 census, the latest year for which official figures are available, the Romanian Orthodox Church had 19,802,389 members (86.8 percent of the population) including about 26,000 Serbs and 53,000 Ukrainians. The Roman Catholic Church had 1,161,942 members. The Catholic Church of Byzantine Rite (Greek Catholics or Uniates) had 223,327 members. This figure is disputed by the Greek Catholic Church, which claims that the census was taken in an atmosphere of intimidation that discouraged Greek Catholics from declaring themselves as such. The Greek Catholic Church estimated in 1999 that its adherents number close to 750,000 members. (Greek Catholics were former members of the Romanian Orthodox Church who accepted the four principles that were required for union with the Roman Catholic Church in 1697, but continue to observe Orthodox festivals and many Orthodox traditions). The Old Rite Christian Church had 28,141 members (of whom 3,711 are ethnic Romanians and 24,016 are ethnic Lippovans/Russians). The Protestant Reformed Church had 802,454 members (of whom 765,370 are ethnic

Hungarians). The Christian Evangelical Church had 49,963 members. The Evangelical Augustinian Church had 39,119 members (including 3,660 Romanians and 27,313 ethnic Germans). The Lutheran Evangelical Church Synod-Presbyterian had 21,221 members (including 12,842 ethnic Hungarians). The Unitarian Church of Romania had 76,708 members. The Baptist Church had 109,462 members. The Apostolic Church of God (Pentecostal Church) had 220,824 members (400,000, according to the Pentecostals). The Seventh-Day Christian Adventist Church had 77,546 members. The Armenian Church had 2,023 members. There were 9,670 Jews, according to the 1992 census (the Jewish Community Federation states that there are about 12,000 members). Muslims numbered 55,928. According to the same census, the number of atheists was 10,331. There were 24,314 people who do not have any religious affiliation and 8,137 people who did not declare any religious affiliation.

According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, most religions have followers dispersed throughout the country, but a few religious communities are concentrated in particular regions. Old Rite members (Lippovans) are located in Moldavia and Dobrogea. Most Muslims are located in the southeastern part of the country in Dobrogea (near Bulgaria and the coast). Most Greek Catholics are in Transylvania but there are also Greek Catholics in Moldavia. Protestant and Catholic believers tend to be in Transylvania, but many also are located around Bacau. Orthodox or Greek Catholic ethnic Ukrainians are mostly in the northwestern part of the country. Orthodox ethnic Serbs are in Banat. Armenians are in Moldavia and the south.

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, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Presbyterian Church, Transcendental Meditation, Hare Krishna, and Zen Buddhism are active denominations in the country.

According to a nationwide poll conducted in February 2001, 23 percent of those polled say that they go to church on a weekly basis; 24 percent claim to go several times per month; 29 percent attend services several times per year; 13 percent go only once a year or less; and 11 percent do not go to church at all. The same poll shows that 86 percent of citizens say that church is the institution they trust most.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for religious freedom, and the Government generally respects this right in practice; however, laws and decrees give the Government considerable potential control over religious life. Government registration and recognition requirements still 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, as well as interfered with other religious activities.

A Communist era decree, number 177 of 1948, remains the basic law governing religious denominations. It allows considerable state control over religious life. Technically, none of the articles of this law have been abrogated; however, according to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, 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. To be recognized as a religion, religious groups must register with the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations and present their statutes, organizational, leadership, and management diagrams, and the body of dogma and doctrines formally stated by a religion. The Government has refused to register a number of religious groups, and no religious group has received status as a religion since 1990. The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations stated that this was due to provisions of Decree 177 of 1948, which stipulates the recognition of religious denominations by 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 State Secretariat stated that the registration of any new religion is not possible.

Under the provisions of Decree 177 of 1948, the Government recognized 14 religions. In addition to this, a December 1989 decree reestablished the Greek Catholic Church as a recognized religion, which had been forced to merge with the Romanian Orthodox Church by another Communist decree in 1948. Only the clergy of these 15 recognized religions are eligible to receive state support. Recognized religions have the right to establish schools, teach religion in public schools, receive 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. The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations reported that it licensed 622 religious and charitable foundations, as well as cultural organizations, under Law 21 of 1924 on

Juridical Entities, thereby entitling them to juridical status as well as to exemptions from income and customs taxes. According to Decree 177 of 1948 on Religion, in order to be recognized as juridical entities, religious and charitable foundations must request and receive approval from the Government through the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations. After receiving the approval, such organizations have to apply for registration in local court, which has the final authority under the law to register religious organizations, but the courts usually defer to the opinion of the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations.

A government decree (26 of 2000) on associations and foundations became effective on May 1, 2000, abrogating Law 21 of 1924. The new law eliminates, at least in theory, the bureaucratic obstacles in the registration process, which religious groups repeatedly criticized as arbitrary and time-consuming. It also removes the minimum requirement of members needed to establish religious associations and foundations. The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations reported in May 2001 that 50 new religious associations received approval for registration in 2000 and 3 associations were approved as of May 2001.

The number of adherents that each religion had in the 1992 census determines the proportion of the budget each recognized religion receives. The Romanian Orthodox religion, in accordance with its size as recorded in the 1992 census, receives the largest share of governmental financial support. In addition, Orthodox religious leaders generally preside over state occasions. In 2000 the Government allocated funds amounting to almost \$11 million (235 billion lei) to the Orthodox Church, approximately \$650,000 (14 billion lei) to the Roman Catholic Church, close to \$925,000 (over 20 billion lei) to the Greek Catholic Church, and about \$280,000 (6 billion lei) to the Reformed Church, for the construction and repair of churches.

According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, about 1,000 missionaries per year who enter the country as tourists can renew their residence permits without special formalities. They require only a formal letter of request from the religious group for which they work. This process reportedly became smoother and faster by the end of 1999, and continued to be satisfactory during the period covered by this report. The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations reported that approximately 1,200 missionaries received visa extensions in 2000 and about 500 renewed their visas in the first half of 2001. Most religious groups state that they have not been faced with any problems other than minor delays in getting residence permit extensions for their missionaries.

The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations used to differentiate between missionaries of recognized religions, who received 1-year visa extensions, and those of unrecognized religions, who were granted only 6-month visa extensions, apparently due to an agreement between the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations and the Interior Ministry. A new law on foreigners, 123 of April 2001, eliminates this distinction by providing only 6-month extensions for all categories. Religious groups expressed concern about this provision. According to the same law, there are penalties for any foreigner who stays without a visa, but such penalties do not appear to be linked to religious activities.

New regulations issued by the Government on May 22, 2001, for the organization and operation of the commission in charge of granting approvals for the construction of places of worship defines these as "buildings such as churches, houses of prayer, temples, mosques, synagogues, houses of assembly, etc., used by religious denominations, religious associations and foundations for their specific religious services." The new regulations therefore no longer differentiate between recognized religions and unrecognized religions in terms of what they are allowed to build as places of worship.

However, there are other provisions in these regulations that could make it more difficult for minority (non-Orthodox, whether recognized or unrecognized) religious groups to get such approvals. Approval is mandatory for obtaining a permit to build a church or other place of worship. The commission that approves such permits consists of 11 permanent members. Only the Orthodox Church has members on this commission. Two members are representatives of the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations; four represent the Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations; and two represent the Orthodox Patriarchate and the Orthodox Theological Institute. The previous commission was composed of technical experts from the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations and the Ministry of Public Works and Territorial Management, and did not include members of the Orthodox Church. In addition to the technical aspects of building a church, the new commission is entitled to decide on the "opportune-ness" of building the place of worship, and whether the construction is in line with the specific dogma, doctrines, and statutes of the religion in question.

In February 2001, the new Government circulated for comment to the 15 recognized religions the text of a possible new draft bill on religious denominations. This bill was actually the same bill that had been submitted by the previous Government to Parliament in September 1999. At that time it generated much criticism. Viewing it as undemocratic and restrictive of religious freedom, most religious denominations, religious and human rights groups, and foreign observers called for the draft law's withdrawal. If enacted the law effectively would have restricted freedom of religion, by imposing tough conditions on the registration of religious denominations and religious groups. It also would have required applicants to have a membership totaling 1/2 of 1 percent of the country's population (over 100,000 persons), and strengthened the powers of the State Secretary for Religious Denominations. The draft law would have declared the Romanian Orthodox Church to be the national church.

Following strong concerns raised by human rights and religious freedom groups as well foreign observers, in February 2000 the previous Government decided to withdraw the bill it had proposed in 1999. The new Government declared that this bill would be used only as a starting point in drafting a new one based on the proposals made by recognized religions. Unrecognized religions were not consulted on this issue. According to the State Secretary for Religious Denominations, the Government plans to amend the original bill based on the 15 religious denominations' opinions and then discuss it in a meeting with all the recognized religions. Government officials expect the bill to be submitted to Parliament in early 2002. Most minority religious groups reiterated their criticism of the religion bill.

Minority religious groups assert that they have found central government and parliamentary officials more cooperative than local officials. They specifically reported that relations with the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, which started to improve at the end of 1999, continued to improve until the end of the previous Government's term in office. Most minority religions expect to redevelop positive relations with officials of the new Government and the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations.

Until the elections of November 2000, the State Secretary for Religious Denominations reported directly to the Prime Minister. The new Government moved the Secretariat into the Ministry of Culture, with the State Secretary now reporting to the Culture Minister. Religious groups are concerned about the Government's decision to reestablish the position of local Inspector for Culture and Religious Denominations in the counties, a position reminiscent of the Communist period, when such inspectors used to monitor the activity of religious groups.

Following a Supreme Court ruling in July 1999, the Ministry of Education no longer requires Adventist students to come to school or take exams on Saturdays.

Between October 31 and November 2, 2000, the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations sponsored a meeting of the heads of the departments for religious affairs from the Balkan countries to exchange information about the developments in the religious life in these countries.

Christmas and the Orthodox Easter are national holidays, but this does not appear to affect any of the other religious groups. Members of the other recognized religions that celebrate Easter are entitled by law to have an additional holiday.

Religious leaders occasionally play a role in politics. In particular, many Orthodox leaders make public appearances alongside prominent political figures on various occasions.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Although 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. The Government denied these allegations. In some instances, local police and administrative authorities tacitly supported, at times violent, societal campaigns against proselytizing (see Section III). There appears to be no clear understanding by the authorities of what activities constitute proselytizing.

The Government requires religious groups to register; representatives of religious groups that sought recognition after 1990 allege 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, Jehovah's Witnesses, the Adventist Movement for Reform, the Baha'i Faith, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) are some of the religious groups that have tried unsuccessfully to register as religions. The Baha'i Faith stated that it has never received any answer to its repeated requests to be registered as a religious denomination. Jehovah's Witnesses also complained that the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations consistently had refused to grant it status as a religion, despite a March 2000 Supreme Court ruling that recognized the modified statutes of Jehovah's Witnesses as a Christian religious denomination. The court ruling asked the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations to issue an administrative document recognizing Jehovah's Witnesses, but the State Secretariat refused to do so. In response, Jehovah's Witnesses asked for damages in court and, consequently, the Ministry of Culture and Religious Denominations will have to pay a symbolic \$.02 (500 lei) per day fine to the State as of May 9, 2001.

The Government has not granted any religious group status as a religion since 1990. The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations stated that this was due to provisions of Decree 177 of 1948, which stipulates the recognition of religious denominations by 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 State Secretariat stated that the registration of any new religion is not possible.

Several unrecognized religions have complained in the past that, in most cases, the courts did not accept

their registration without approval of the State Secretariat of Religious Denominations. These organizations receive no financial support from the State, other than limited tax and import duty exemptions, and are not permitted to engage in profit-making activities. Moreover, until May 2001, religious groups registered as foundations or charitable organizations were allowed to rent or build office space only; they were not permitted to build churches or other buildings designated as houses of worship. According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, such religious groups received building permits only for halls of prayer because the legislation in force made reference only to religions and did not include any provisions for religious associations. The differentiation between religions and religious associations with regard to the construction of places of worship appeared to be an arbitrary decision by the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations.

Representatives of minority religious groups dispute the 1992 census results and claimed that census takers in some cases simply assigned an affiliation without inquiring about religious affiliation. Moreover, representatives of several minority religious groups complain that off-budget funds are allocated in many cases in a biased manner, mostly favoring the Romanian Orthodox Church. For example, minority religious groups complained that Orthodox churches were built in areas without Orthodox believers. According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, off-budget funds are distributed depending on the needs of the various religious denominations.

The Government's approach to building places of worship by organized churches varied, depending upon whether the religious group was a recognized religion or not. Prior to the new regulations issued in May 2001, unrecognized religious groups received approvals only for "halls of prayer" and not for "places of worship." Several unrecognized religious groups have made credible allegations that their efforts to acquire property, including getting building permits and other documents, were delayed or impeded for lengthy periods of time by local officials. They claim that local Orthodox clergy encouraged these delays. The last State Secretary for Religious Denominations, Nicolae Branzea, who was in office between September 1999 and November 2000 under the former center-right coalition government, canceled an internal note issued by his predecessor which had asked local authorities to deny building licenses to religious associations and foundations. As a result, it was much easier to get licenses during the Branzea period, although some religious groups still complained of delays. According to a book published by Branzea, from September 1999 to October 2000 the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations granted 133 building licenses to the Orthodox Church, 22 to the Greek Catholic Church, 7 to the Roman Catholic Church, and 13 to the Pentecostal Church.

Since the new Government came in power in December 2000, no approvals have been granted on the grounds that the Government is changing the composition and mission of the commission in charge of issuing such approvals. Some religious groups allege that this is a pretext used by the Government to deny them approval for the construction of places of worship. In May 2001, the new Government instituted new regulations for the commission. While these new regulations no longer differentiate between recognized religions and unrecognized religions in terms of the types of places of worship that can be built, they include provisions that could make approvals more difficult to obtain. For example, the commission is entitled to decide on the "opportuneness" of building the place of worship.

The law does not prohibit or punish assembly for peaceful religious activities. However, several different minority religious groups complained that on various occasions local authorities and Orthodox priests prevented religious activities from taking place, even when they had been issued permits. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church reported difficulties in getting approvals to use public halls for religious activities in the villages of Luna, Baiut, and Valenii de Maramures (Maramures County). Even when the Church could obtain permission, Orthodox priests incited the local population against activities sponsored by the Adventist Church. The religious activities of the Baptist Church and the Evangelical Alliance often have been obstructed by the local authorities under the influence of the local Orthodox clergy in Crucea, Valul lui Traian (Constanta County), Isaccea (Tulcea County), Fratilesti, Savesti (Ialomita County), Vinatori, Tulucesti (Galati County), Sutesti, Gemelele (Braila County). According to Jehovah's Witnesses, in January 2001 a school principal in Tirgu Neamt (Neamt County) was asked by the mayor to resign on the grounds of his religious affiliation, allegedly following pressure by the local Orthodox priest.

The Government permits, but does not require religious instruction in public schools. Only the 15 recognized religions are entitled to hold religion classes in public schools. While the law permits instruction according to the faith of students' parents, minority recognized religious groups complain that they have been unable to have classes offered in their faith in public schools. According to minority religious groups, this happens mostly because the local inspectors for religion classes are Orthodox priests who deny accreditation to teachers of other religions. Religious teachers are permitted to instruct only students of the same religious faith. However, minority religious groups credibly asserted that there were cases of children pressured to attend classes of Orthodox religion, despite the fact that religion classes were optional, according to the Education Law. The Jehovah's Witnesses Association reported one case in Agapia (Neamt County), where a child member was subject to the threat of not graduating unless she attended the Orthodox religion classes. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church reported similar situations in Crasna Viseului (Maramures County), Ciocanari and Mircea Voda (Braila County), Provita (Prahova County), Tiroviste and Bucsani (Dimbovita County).

Only the 15 recognized religions are entitled to give religious assistance to prisoners. Minority recognized

religious groups complained that Orthodox priests denied them access to some penitentiaries. Seventh-Day Adventists asserted that they were not allowed to give religious assistance in the penitentiaries of Gherla and Poarta Alba. Moreover, Orthodox priests in the penitentiaries of Margineni and Gaesti gave their approval only after reviewing religious material to be handed over to the prisoners. The Baptist Church also had difficulties in getting access to the penitentiaries of Oradea, Satu Mare, and Carei.

In May 2001, the Parliament overturned government Decree 106 of 2000. Accordingly, there is no legislation at present regarding military clergy. Decree 106 of August 2000 entitled the 15 recognized religions to have military clergy trained to render religious assistance to conscripts. According to minority religions, with the exception of two representatives of the Catholic and the Evangelical Alliance, the military clergy is comprised only of Orthodox priests. The Baptist Church has similar complaints concerning religious instruction and military clergy.

The Parliament has passed no law restituting religious or communal properties, large numbers of which were seized under the Communist regimes. Some religious or communal property has been returned to former owners as a result of government decrees, or with the agreement of local religious leaders. The center-right government in office between 1996 and 2000 issued four decrees and a government decision, restituting 100 buildings to religious and national minorities. A fifth decree, 94 of 2000, would have returned 10 buildings to each territorial unit of each religious denomination from which property was seized. An October 2000 government decree created a commission to consider a list of properties submitted by churches under Decree 94 of 2000. According to this decree, both the Hungarian churches and the Greek Catholic Church would have received buildings. However, following the election of the new Government, implementation of this decree was halted, and no properties actually have been restituted under the provisions of Decree 94 of 2000.

In many cases religious minorities have not succeeded in regaining actual possession of the properties despite restitution by these decrees. Many properties returned by decree house state offices, schools, hospitals, or cultural institutions that would require relocation, and lawsuits and protests by current possessors have delayed restitution of the property to the rightful owners.

Law 10 of 2001 on nationalized buildings, passed in January 2001, specifies that a different law is to address the restitution of communal property. This law excepts from restitution the properties now being used "in the public interest," such as hospitals, schools, cultural buildings, party headquarters, nongovernmental organization (NGO) offices, and day-care centers. In some cases, the former owners are to receive compensation, the value of which is unclear. A law on compensation is expected to be adopted at a later, unspecified date.

The Greek Catholic community has been less successful than any other group in regaining its properties. The Greek Catholic Church was the second largest denomination (about 1.5 million adherents out of a population of about 15 million) in 1948 when Communist authorities outlawed it and dictated its forced merger with the Romanian Orthodox Church. The latter received most of the former Greek Catholic properties, including over 2,600 churches and other facilities.

According to the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations, the Greek Catholic Church has received 200 of the churches transferred by the Communists to the Orthodox Church; the Greek Catholics claim they have received only 137 such properties. The Greek Catholic Church has very few places of worship. Many followers still are compelled to hold services in public places (approximately 105 such cases, according to Greek Catholic reports) or in parks (3 cases, in Baia Mare, Prunis, and Rosia Montana, according to the same reports.) In 1992 the Government adopted a decree that listed 80 properties owned by the Greek Catholic Church to be returned. Between 60 and 65 of them have been returned to date. In some cases, Orthodox priests whose families had been Greek Catholics converted back to Greek Catholicism and brought their parishes and churches back with them to the Greek Catholic Church. In several counties, in particular in Transylvania, local Orthodox leaders have given up smaller country churches voluntarily. For example, in the Diocese of Lugoj in the southwestern part of the country, local Orthodox Church representatives have reached agreement on the return of an estimated 160 churches; however, for the most part Orthodox leaders have refused to return to the Greek Catholics those churches that they acquired during the Communist era. Since July 2000, the Greek Catholic Church has recovered only 1 church and 500 of the 3,200 square meters of land it claimed in the village of Unirea (Cluj County). Orthodox Archbishop of Timisoara, Nicolae Corneanu, was responsible for returning some churches, including the cathedral in Lugoj, to the Greek Catholic Church. However, due to his actions, the Orthodox Holy Synod marginalized Archbishop Corneanu and his fellow clergymen criticized him.

A 1990 government decree called for the creation of a joint Orthodox and Greek Catholic committee to decide the fate of churches that had belonged to the Greek Catholic Church before 1948. However, the Government has not enforced this decree, and the Orthodox Church consistently has resisted efforts to resolve the issue in that forum. The committee did not meet until October 1998 and had three more meetings in 1999. The courts generally refuse to consider Greek Catholic lawsuits seeking restitution, citing the 1990 decree establishing the joint committee to resolve the issue. From the initial property list of 2,600 seized properties, the Greek Catholic Church has reduced the properties that it is asking to be returned to fewer than 300, all of them churches. No agreement on these returns has come from the joint committee

meetings. Restitution of the existing churches is important to both sides because local residents are likely to attend the church whether it is Greek Catholic or Orthodox. Thus the number of members and share of the state budget allocation for religions is at stake. At the most recent meeting of the joint committee on September 28, 2000, the Orthodox Church proposed once again to help the Greek Catholics build new churches and agreed to hold alternate religious services with the Greek Catholics for a short period of time until new churches are built. A new meeting of the committee was scheduled for October 2001.

The historical Hungarian churches, including the Roman Catholic as well as the Protestant churches (Reformed, Evangelical, and Unitarian), have received a small number of their properties back from the Government. Churches from these denominations were closed but not seized by the Communist regimes. However, the Communist regimes confiscated many of these groups' secular properties, which still are used for public schools, museums, libraries, post offices, and student dormitories. Of the 1,791 buildings reclaimed by the Hungarian churches, 110 buildings were restituted by government decrees. Of these 110 buildings, 80 should have been restituted according to government Decree 94 of 2000. Of the remaining 30, the Hungarian churches could take full or at least partial possession of only 8 buildings. The restitution of another 9 buildings is in progress. Restitution of the remainder has been delayed due to lawsuits or opposition from current possessors. For example, restitution under Decree 13 of 1998 of the Roman-Catholic Bishop's Palace in Oradea and the Bathyanæum Library (which had also belonged to the Roman Catholic Church) has been delayed by lawsuits. In addition, the new Minister of Culture and Religious Denominations has stated that he is opposed to their restitution, irrespective of the court rulings on these lawsuits.

The Jewish community has received, by government decree, 42 buildings. Of these, the community has completed the paperwork for the restitution of only 15, and lawsuits are in progress for 7 of these 15 properties. The Jewish community has been able to reclaim land only in Iasi, where it received 15 pieces of land (of former synagogues and schools) between 1999 and 2000.

Another problem with restitution is often a simple refusal by the possessor to return a property or pay rent for occupancy. The nominal owner still can be held liable for payment of property taxes in such cases. For example, the former Reformed College was restituted to the Reformed Church in Cluj by government decree in 1999. The building currently is used as a high school, which does not pay any rent, and the Reformed Church has had to pay property taxes but has not been able to occupy the property.

According to Law 1 of 2000, religious denominations are entitled to claim between 25 to 250 acres of farmland (depending on the type of religious unit—parish, eparchy, bishopric, etc.) and up to 75 acres of forest land from properties seized by the Communists. This is the first law that establishes a systematic procedure for churches to claim land. However, the implementation of this provision has been delayed and the Government has expressed an intention to modify the law.

The Hungarian churches repeatedly have expressed dissatisfaction with the Government's failure to allow by law the establishment of confessional schools subsidized by the State.

There were no reports of religious detainees or prisoners.

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 Government's refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

There are generally amicable relations among the different religious groups. However, the Romanian Orthodox Church repeatedly has criticized strongly the "aggressive proselytizing" of Protestant, neo-Protestant, and other religious groups, which the Church has repeatedly described as "sects." There is no law against proselytizing, or clear understanding of what activities consist of proselytizing. Proselytizing that involves denigrating established churches is perceived as provocative. This has led to conflicts in some cases. For example, an Orthodox priest beat a Mormon missionary in the streets of Pitesti (Arges County) in May 2001. The police, although not very cooperative initially, eventually contributed to resolving this conflict. On June 20, 2001, members of the "New Right" (Noua Dreapta) organization (a small, right-extreme group with nationalistic, xenophobic views) allegedly beat four Mormon missionaries while riding on a streetcar in Bucharest. Harassment of Jehovah's Witnesses in Mizil continued during the period covered by this report. In July 2000, during a trial initiated by persons with ties to the Orthodox Church, the court in Mizil ordered six members of Jehovah's Witnesses to pay penal fines on charges of insult and assault. A higher county court rejected Jehovah's Witnesses appeal in December 2000. Jehovah's Witnesses have decided to file a complaint with the European Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg.

The centuries-long domination of the Orthodox Church, and its status as the majority religion, has resulted in the Orthodox Church's reluctance (in particular at the local level and with the support of low-level officials) to

accept the existence of other religions. Consequently, actions by other religious groups to attract members are perceived by the Orthodox Church as attempts to diminish the number of its members. Due to its substantial influence, few politicians dare to sponsor bills and measures that would oppose the Orthodox Church. According to minority religious groups, the population is receptive to minority Christian confessions and local officials tend to be tolerant but often are pressured and intimidated by the Orthodox clergy. Minority religious groups allege that the Orthodox clergy have provoked isolated mob incidents.

Representatives of minority religions credibly complain 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 often have been interpreted as proselytizing. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church mentioned incidents mostly in rural areas, where Orthodox priests had not allowed Adventist ministers to conduct the burial rituals in localities where the number of Adventist members was small. Such cases occurred in Costesti and Armasu (Bacau County), Cuparu and Doicești (Dambovita County), Busteni and Cojasca (Prahova County), Scinteia and Progresu (Ialomita County), Malu (Giurgiu County), as well as in some localities in Galati, Bacau, and Iasi Counties. However, in most cases, the problems were resolved with the intervention of the prefect, the representative of the central Government to the country's counties.

The Greek Catholic, Baptist, and Pentecostal Churches also have reported similar refusals by Orthodox clergy to allow the burial of the believers of these churches in Orthodox cemeteries. Cases have occurred in Negresti Oas (Satu Mare County), according to Greek Catholic reports, and in Bihor County, according to Baptist reports.

The Seventh-Day Adventist Church also reported a series of peaceful assemblies that were disrupted by noisy groups, allegedly incited by Orthodox clergy, including incidents in Ciudanovita and Glimoca (Caras Severin County). According to Adventists, Orthodox priests beat school children for having participated in Adventist meetings and Orthodox priests insulted Adventist members, for example in Perieni (Ias County).

In some areas, Orthodox clergy threatened Baptists ministers in order to make them leave the localities.

According to the Baha'i Faith, a show and an exhibit sponsored by their association in Herestrau Park in Bucharest in July 2000 were disrupted by a group of youths, who called them a "sect," used the Nazi greeting, shouted "long live the Orthodox Church," and destroyed all the exhibit materials. The police cooperated with the Baha'is in investigating the incident.

In addition, the dialog between the Orthodox and the Greek Catholic churches has not eliminated disputes at the local level and has led to little real progress in solving the problem of the restitution of the Greek Catholic assets (see Section II).

The disputes between Greek Catholics and Orthodox believers over church possession have decreased in number during the period covered by this report. This was due mostly to the Greek Catholics' decision in many cases to build new churches, following lack of progress made in obtaining their properties back either by dialog with the Orthodox Church or in court. Tensions continue to exist in Prunis (Cluj County) where most of the residents belong to the Greek Catholic Church and are forced to hold religious services in the open because the Orthodox priest does not allow them to use the church. In Decea (Alba County) tensions increased when the Orthodox priest locked the church so that the Greek Catholics could not use it. In Bicsad (Satu Mare County), where the Greek Catholics obtained a government decision restituting a former Greek Catholic monastery, the Greek Catholic Church still could not take possession of the monastery because of the opposition of the local Orthodox clergy. Local authorities have not supported the enforcement of the Government's decision.

In Dumbraveni the Orthodox Church's opposition to a court-ordered resolution to share the local church has forced the Greek Catholics to hold their religious services in a high school. The Orthodox Church eventually decided to build a new church and to restitute the old one to the Greek Catholics after it is completed. Until then, the Greek Catholics continue holding the religious service in the school building.

Most mainstream politicians have criticized anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia publicly. In March 2001, President Ion Iliescu strongly condemned racism, xenophobia, and intolerance in his address to an international symposium on this issue. However, the fringe press continued to publish anti-Semitic articles. Legionnaire (an extreme nationalist, anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi group) books from the inter-war period continued to be published. There have been repeated attempts to deny the Holocaust in the country (through symposia and press articles) and to rehabilitate World War II dictator Marshal Ion Antonescu. Three textbooks on sects and ecumenism, authored by an Orthodox deacon for use in schools, disseminate anti-Semitic, pro-Fascist, and antiecumenical ideas.

In May 2001, the Israeli ambassador expressed concern about the publication of two jokes about the extermination of Jews by the Nazis in a book published by a member of the right-extreme Greater Romania Party (PRM). The Minister of Justice called for an investigation, the publishing house sent a letter of apology to the Israeli Ambassador, and the PRM leader apologized to the Jewish community.

Over the period covered by the report, Jewish cemeteries were desecrated in six localities. The perpetrator was identified in only one case. The perpetrators in the other five cases could not be identified, but are believed to have been local youths, rather than members of an organized anti-Semitic movement. Four synagogues were desecrated during the same period. In December 2000, the Museum of Jewish History in Bucharest was ransacked. President Iliescu and other prominent figures expressed concern about this act of vandalism. The perpetrators remained unidentified.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government in the context of its overall dialog and policy of promoting human rights. The Embassy met with the PSDR Government early in 2001 when it seemed about to resubmit the old religious bill, and reiterated the U.S. Government's objections to it, as had been done had with the previous Government. The Embassy also maintains close contact with a broad range of religious groups in the country. Embassy staff, including the human rights officer, political counselor, and the Ambassador, met with religious leaders and government officials who work on religious affairs in Bucharest and in other cities.

In addition, Embassy staff members are in frequent contact with numerous NGO's that monitor developments in the country's religious life. U.S. officials have lobbied consistently in government circles for fair treatment on property restitution issues, including religious and communal properties. The Embassy has a core group of officials who focus on fostering good ethnic relations, including relations between religious groups.

The U.S. Embassy has developed an International Visitors program on religious freedom, within which a group of clergy belonging to different religious denominations traveled to the U.S. for 3 weeks in June 2001.

[End]

Released on October 26, 2001

[International Religious Freedom Report Home Page](#)

This site is managed by the Bureau of Public Affairs, U.S. Department of State. External links to other Internet sites should not be construed as an endorsement of the views contained therein.

