

ROMANIA 2018 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits restrictions on 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 have the freedom to organize "in accordance with their own statutes." According to law, the state recognizes the "important role" of the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the history of the country. The law specifies a three-tiered classification of religious organizations; civil associations wishing to perform religious functions may organize under a separate provision of the law. The government approved applications for two Christian associations – The "Philadelphia" Roma's Union of Pentecostal Assemblies and God's Union of Pentecostal Churches. There were continued reports of the slow pace of restitution of confiscated properties, especially to the Greek Catholic Church and the Jewish community. During the year, the government rejected 609 restitution claims for confiscated religious properties and approved 52; it approved no claims for the Greek Catholic Church. Minority religious groups continued to state that national and local governments gave preference to the ROC, and they reported incidents of discrimination against them. In July President Klaus Iohannis promulgated a law on countering anti-Semitism that criminalizes the promotion of anti-Semitic ideas and the establishment of anti-Semitic organizations.

Minority religious groups continued to report harassment of their congregations by ROC priests and adherents, along with the blocking of their access to cemeteries. A study on values shared by middle school and high school teachers reported that approximately one-third of teachers did not want persons belonging to a different religion as neighbors. There was a case of anti-Semitic vandalism of Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel's childhood home in Sighetu Marmatiei. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), local media outlets depicted largely Muslim refugees as a threat because of their religion.

In meetings with the general secretary of the government, U.S. embassy officials continued to raise concerns about the slow pace of the restitution process and the low number of properties restored to minority religious groups. Embassy officials facilitated meetings between the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) and government officials to help speed the processes of property restitution and pensions for Holocaust survivors. In meetings with President Iohannis, Prime Minister Danila, Bucharest Mayor Firea, and other officials, the embassy continued

its support for the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania (Wiesel Institute) and the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in its efforts to establish a museum of Jewish history. The Ambassador participated in commemorations of the Holocaust and spoke out against religious intolerance in the country.

Section I. Religious Demography

The U.S. government estimates the population at 21.5 million (July 2018 estimate). According to a 2011 government census, ROC adherents constitute 86.5 percent of the population and Roman Catholics almost 5 percent. According to the census, there are approximately 151,000 Greek Catholics; however, Greek Catholics estimate their numbers at 488,000. Other religious groups include Old Rite Russian Christians; Protestants, including Reformed Protestants, Pentecostals, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Evangelical Lutherans, 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 2011 census, Old Rite Russian Christians are mainly located in Moldavia and Dobrogea. Most Muslims live in the southeast around Constanta. Most Greek Catholics reside in Transylvania. Protestants of various denominations and Roman Catholics reside primarily in Transylvania. Orthodox and Greek Catholic ethnic Ukrainians 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 40 percent of the country's Jewish population of 3,400 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 the law. The law 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 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. The law forbids public authorities or private legal entities from asking individuals to specify their religion, with the exception of the census.

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 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.

By law, there are 18 religious organizations recognized as “religious denominations,” all of which were in existence at the time the specific law on religion was enacted in 2006. They include 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.

For additional organizations to obtain recognition as religious denominations, the law specifies they must demonstrate 12 years of continuous activity since the law’s passage, which could not occur before 2018. 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 (approximately 21,500 persons).

The law defines a religious association as an organization of at least 300 citizens who share and practice the same faith and that 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 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 and do not need approval from the national secretariat to operate.

Civil 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. Civil associations may not qualify under the numerical/administrative criteria (300 members) for recognition as religious associations or may choose not to apply for such recognition. 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 associations are not required to submit their members' personal data.

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, partially pay clergy salaries 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."

Religious associations do not receive government funding, 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; however, they may practice their religious beliefs, including in public.

Civil associations engaged in religious activities may engage in religious worship. 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 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. 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 associations and foundations.

The law entitles all types of religious organizations to bury their deceased members in cemeteries belonging to other religious organizations – with the exception of Jewish and Muslim cemeteries – in localities where they do not have cemeteries of their own and where there is no public cemetery. 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. This includes the possibility of clergy functioning 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 director of the detention facility.

The law provides for the restitution of religious properties confiscated between 1940 and 1989, during World War II (WWII) and the ensuing communist regime, as long as 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 stay 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. Although the

provisions of the law on restitution state a separate law would be adopted to address such cases, as of year's end there was no such law.

A separate statute on the reinstatement of the Greek Catholic Church regulates the restitution of properties to the Greek Catholic 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 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 the evidence, usually in the possession of other state authorities, but were unable to do so.

The law nullifies acts of forced “donations” of Jewish property during WWII and the communist era and lowers the burden of proof for the previous owners or their heirs to obtain restitution. The law designates the present-day 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.

By law, religious education in schools is optional. Each of the 18 legally recognized religious denominations is entitled to offer religion classes, based on its own religious teachings, in schools. 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.

Under the law, parents of students under 18 years of age are required to request their children's participation in religion classes, while students 18 and older may themselves ask to attend religion classes. Although a student normally takes a school course based on the religious teachings of the denomination to which the student belongs, it is also possible for a student to take a religion course offered by his or her denomination outside the school system and bring a certificate from the denomination to receive academic credit.

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

The law forbids religious proselytizing in schools. If teachers proselytize, the school management decides the punishment based on the conclusions of an internal committee.

The law states the religion of a child who has turned 14 may not be changed without the child's consent, and from age 16 an individual has the right to choose her/his religion.

The law bans discrimination on religious grounds in all areas of public life. It also bans religious defamation and stirring conflict on religious grounds, as well as public offenses against religious symbols. Penalties may include fines varying from 1,000 to 100,000 lei (\$250 to \$24,600), depending on whether the victim is an individual or a community.

A law that went into effect in July counters anti-Semitism and criminalizes the promotion of anti-Semitic ideas and the establishment of anti-Semitic organizations. Under this law, anti-Semitism is defined as a perception about Jews expressed in the form of anti-Jewish hatred, as well as speech and physical acts motivated by hatred against Jews that target Jews, non-Jews or their belongings, Jewish community institutions, or Jewish places of worship. Penalties for publicly promoting anti-Semitic ideas and doctrines or manufacturing and disseminating anti-Semitic symbols range from three months' to three years' imprisonment and the loss of certain rights. Penalties for establishing anti-Semitic organizations range from three to 10 years' imprisonment and the loss of certain rights.

A law passed in 2015 prohibits the establishment of fascist, Legionnaire, racist, or xenophobic organizations, which it defines in part as groups that promote violence, religiously motivated hatred, or extremist nationalism, the latter term undefined. Reference to anti-Semitism in the 2015 law was removed following the

implementation of an anti-Semitism law in July. 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 before the organization begins its activity; penalties are halved if the individual helps authorities with the criminal investigation. Legislation 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 circumstances, of up to 200,000 lei (\$49,200). Publicly promoting the cult of persons convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes may incur fines and prison terms ranging from three months to three years and from six months to five years if done online. The same penalties apply to publicly promoting anti-Semitic, fascist, Legionnaire, racist, or xenophobic ideas, worldviews, or doctrines.

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 by 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.

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

Government Practices

By year's end, the government had approved two applications for religious association status during the year, both of which were Christian – the "Philadelphia" Roma's Union of Pentecostal Assemblies and God's Union of Pentecostal Churches. As of October, 35 entities with diverse religious affiliations were registered as religious associations, up from 33 in 2017.

Baha'i leaders continued to seek options for the burial of deceased persons in accordance with their religious burial practices, including requesting the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations to help them establish a cemetery. Baha'is continued to be registered as a religious association and not as a denomination.

Religious groups continued to state they viewed the 300-person membership requirement and the need to submit their 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 the personal data of their members. They also continued to criticize the three-tier classification system for religious organizations.

The Jehovah's Witnesses reported that in several areas of the country, some members continued to encounter opposition to their activities and threats from public authorities and ROC priests. They said the mayor of Mogosesti village in Iasi County threatened representatives of the Jehovah's Witnesses in August with violence. Following a complaint filed by the Jehovah's Witnesses, the county prefect and the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations instructed the mayor to respect the law on religious freedom. ROC priests from the village of Valea Calugareasca in Prahova County and Calugareni in Giurgiu County threatened to use physical violence against Jehovah's Witnesses representatives in March and October, respectively. Following complaints submitted by the religious denomination, police fined the priests.

On November 23, the Bucharest Court of Appeal ruled as no longer valid a request filed in 2016 by Catalin Berenghi, a former candidate for mayor of Bucharest, to annul a 2015 decision to transfer land in Bucharest to the Muslim community for a mosque. According to the court, the decision to transfer the land was no longer relevant because the Grand Mufti's Office had notified the government it had renounced its right to use the land.

The National Authority for Property Restitution (NAPR), the government agency responsible for overseeing the restitution process, reported the SRC had approved 17 requests for the restitution of "immovable properties" (land or buildings) to religious denominations, approved compensation in 35 cases, and rejected 609 other claims during the year. All of the claims were submissions before the 2006 deadline. In 94 cases, the filers withdrew their claims. According to data provided by NAPR and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the number of cases NAPR reviewed decreased from 1,227 in 2017 to 1,212.

According to NAPR, religious denominations appealed 53 decisions the SRC submitted to the courts during the year. The Roman Catholic Church made 12 appeals; the ROC made nine; the Greek Catholics made 13; the Evangelical Augustinian Church made two; and the Jewish community made 12. Information concerning court decisions on these cases was unavailable. In April 2015 NAPR

rejected a claim submitted by Caritatea Foundation, the NGO the Federation of Jewish Communities and the WJRO established to oversee Jewish communal property claims. The claim concerned a building and a land plot in the city of Piatra Neamt owned by the Jewish community that the city government forced the community to donate in 1953. NAPR stated that Caritatea was not able to submit a copy of the donation agreement within the 120-day deadline. Caritatea representatives said the foundation encountered significant delays in obtaining the document from the National Archives. NAPR, however, did not take into consideration the delay caused by the National Archives' response, stating the 120-day deadline to submit new documents had already passed. Caritatea Foundation appealed NAPR's decision in court. In December 2015, the Bacau Court of Appeal invalidated NAPR's original decision and ruled the SRC should issue a new favorable decision. NAPR challenged the court ruling, arguing that the Caritatea Foundation had not filed the requested document within the 120-day deadline.

During the year, NAPR reviewed 490 claims submitted by the Greek Catholic Church but did not restore any property to the Church or grant it compensation in any cases. Church officials reported that NAPR rejected most of their claims because the properties now belonged to the ROC and were subject to a different law, making restitution possible 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.

The Greek Catholic Church continued to report court delays on restitution lawsuits. Representatives of the Church stated there were no court decisions on Greek Catholic restitution cases during the year.

Restitution of a property in Bixad, previously restored to the Greek Catholic Church by the government and confirmed by earlier court decisions, continued to be delayed while courts considered the case anew, following a 2016 decision by the Alba Tribunal, a county-level court, allowing the Satu Mare County Council to revive its claim for ownership of the property. At year's end, the case was still pending.

Two cases filed in 2016 by the Greek Catholic Church with the European Court of Human Rights for restitution of churches in Bistrita and Breb remained pending. In each case, the Church's complaint concerned court decisions awarding Greek

Catholic property to the ROC based on census data showing Greek Catholics as a minority.

Although the government did not issue regulations for implementing new property restitution legislation passed in 2016 that prioritizes cases involving Holocaust survivors, NAPR approved priority status for 160 such applications it had received. Since the legislation passed, NAPR awarded compensation to Holocaust survivors in 28 cases, rejected the claims in two cases, and requested additional documents for 90 cases.

The SRC had approved 10 pending claims from previous years by the Jewish community as of October – nine through compensation and one through restitution in kind – and rejected 16 others. In 54 other cases, claimants withdrew their requests. Religious groups said 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 the appeal. Caritatea Foundation stated the SRC continued to avoid assuming responsibility for restitution, preferring to pass decisions on to the courts. The foundation also continued to state the claims procedure was overly bureaucratic and unreasonable, in particular because the SRC often requested the submission of numerous additional documents, which sometimes were found only in government-managed archives, giving Jewish claimants little time to meet the final extended 120-day deadline for document submission. Caritatea stated that access to government-managed archives holding the required documents for the restitution process was difficult.

According to Caritatea Foundation, the NCREC issued final approval on two decisions during the year, and 64 decisions issued before 2013 were pending final approval. According to NAPR, a high workload and insufficient staff and resources were the reasons for the delays.

The Reformed, Roman Catholic, Unitarian, and Evangelical Lutheran Churches said the government continued to reject their restitution claims on the grounds the entities registered as the former property owners were not the contemporary churches. Church leaders said the communist regime had dismantled the former church entities while confiscating their property, meaning the former property owners no longer existed as such but the contemporary churches, as the successors to the dismantled churches, were in effect the same entities whose property the communist regime had seized. Twelve claims submitted by the Roman Catholic Church were resolved as of year's end. The government granted compensation or restitution in kind in five cases and denied seven claims. The government

reviewed five claims submitted by the Reformed Church and denied two others. During the year, the government reviewed three pending claims of the Unitarian Church. In one case, the Unitarian Church received compensation; in another case, it received restitution in kind. The government rejected the third claim.

On July 4, the court rejected the Roman Catholic Church's appeal of the SRC's 2015 rejection of its claim for restitution of the Bathyanem Library and an astronomical institute in Alba Iulia in a preliminary ruling.

The percentage of schoolchildren opting to take religion classes remained at almost 90 percent and, according to media, NGOs, and parents' associations, continued to be the result of manipulation and pressure by the ROC as well as the failure of school directors to offer parents alternatives to religion classes. A ministerial order issued in February established that initial requests to take religion classes were valid for the entire study cycle or until students or their legal representatives submitted an alternate request. A previous ministerial order mandated annual submission of requests to take religion classes.

Minority religious groups, including the Christian Evangelical Church, continued to report authorities allowed only the ROC to play an active role in the annual opening ceremonies at schools and other community events throughout the country and usually did not invite other religious groups to attend such ceremonies. According to the Christian Evangelical Church, this happened also in cities where their followers had a significant presence such as Sibiu, Suceava, Iasi, and Piatra-Neamt.

Greek Catholic officials and believers stated that during the celebration events dedicated to the country's centennial celebrations, some local governments had marginalized the Greek Catholic Church and attempted to minimize its role in the country's history. In several online petitions, Greek Catholic believers stated that the ROC and government authorities tried to revise the history of the Greek Catholic Church. In September a group of Greek Catholic believers protested against the dedication of Iuliu Hossu's bust by a ROC official during an event organized by the local government of Milas Village and the Bistrita Nasaud County Council, and Greek Catholics requested that the inscription on the bust mention Iuliu Hossu's affiliation with the Greek Catholic Church. Iuliu Hossu was a Greek-Catholic bishop who had a major role in the unification of Romania and Transylvania in 1918. Protesters also criticized the decision by the mayor of Cosbuc Village and the Bistrita Nasaud County Council to commemorate Greek

Catholic writer George Cosbuc without inviting Greek Catholic priests to attend the event and to have ROC priests dedicate the writer's bust.

Religious groups reported military chaplains continued to be ROC priests with the exception of one Roman Catholic priest and one pastor from the Evangelical Alliance.

The government-established Wiesel Institute reported prosecution of anti-Semitic speech and Holocaust denial continued to be infrequent. According to statistics released by the government for the entire year, the national-level Prosecutor General's Office compiled a list of 42 unresolved cases. Many of the cases included anti-Semitic elements. Of those cases, the office sent one case to trial. Following a complaint by the Wiesel Institute, in 2014 the Bucharest Sector 2 Prosecutor's Office started the prosecution of the self-declared leader of the Legionary Movement for the public use of fascist, racist, and xenophobic symbols. He had previously gone to the Wiesel Institute dressed in a uniform of the Legionary Movement, a Romanian fascist interwar organization, and performed the fascist salute while standing in the institute's courtyard. According to the Wiesel Institute, the file was still pending before the Prosecutor's Office at year's end.

According to the Wiesel Institute, the delay in the prosecution of cases continued due to lengthy investigations. In February NGO Center for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism (MCA) received a notification from the Prosecutor's Office attached to the Targu Jiu Court stating the 2014 case based on a complaint from the MCA concerning a lampshade posted for sale online and advertised as being made of "Jewish skin" had been closed in May 2017. According to forensic investigators, the lampshade was not made of human skin. The MCA stated in November that it was unacceptable that there were no consequences for the person who posted the advertisement even if the lamp was not made of human skin.

The Wiesel Institute reported local authorities continued to name streets, organizations, schools, and libraries after persons convicted of Nazi-era war crimes or crimes against humanity and to allow the erection of statues and busts depicting persons convicted of war crimes. By year's end, the local government in Cluj-Napoca had not changed the name of a street named in 2017 for Radu Gyr, a commander of the Legionnaire movement and apologist for anti-Semitism, who was convicted of war crimes for "contributing to the political aims of Hitlerism and Fascism." The Wiesel Institute had asked city authorities to rename the street. In April 2017, the Wiesel Institute notified the Ministry of Interior about streets,

schools, and busts depicting or named after persons convicted for war crimes and requested the ministry to have county prefects take the necessary measures to stop the public worship of war criminals. At the time, the Ministry of Interior stated they had requested each prefect to analyze each case and take the necessary measures in accordance with the law banning the public worship of war criminals.

In March Romfilatelia, a public company under the national post office, issued a commemorative stamp depicting Patriarch Miron Cristea, who led the ROC between 1925 and 1939 and was prime minister from 1938 to 1939. As prime minister, Cristea was responsible for revising the citizenship law and stripping approximately 225,000 Jews of their citizenship. Many of these persons subsequently died during the Holocaust. The Wiesel Institute publicly asked Romfilatelia to withdraw the stamp, but the company did not respond to the request.

Several government officials made comments that were widely viewed by Jewish organizations as “trivializing” the Holocaust. Agriculture Minister Petre Daea stated in July on Antena 3 news channel that the incineration of pigs in response to a swine flu outbreak was similar to what happened at Auschwitz. In a press statement, the Wiesel Institute said Daea’s statement “was a trivializing comparison between the slaughter of pigs and the extermination of Jews during WW2.” The minister did not retract his comment, stating in a press release, “I respect all the members of the Jewish community and I want to point out that I just wanted to present the very difficult situation that swine breeders are facing because of the African swine fever.”

On September 2, an advisor to Prime Minister Darius Valcov posted a video clip on his Facebook page depicting the German Democrat Forum, an organization of ethnic Germans in the country, as a National Socialist organization and compared the country’s president, Klaus Iohannis, to Adolf Hitler. The ethnic German and Jewish communities, the Wiesel Institute, several NGOs, and opposition political figures condemned Valcov’s behavior, and some called for his resignation. The president of the Jewish community issued a press statement that stated, “We cannot accept a comparison between Mr. President Klaus Werner Iohannis and one of the greatest criminals in history. Mister Iohannis is the opposite of a person with Nazi, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic beliefs.”

The government continued to implement the recommendations of the 2004 International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania (Wiesel Commission) Report and to cooperate with the USHMM in promoting Holocaust education. The

Wiesel Institute continued to organize training sessions for history teachers, carry out educational activities for students, and inform the public about the Holocaust.

The government continued to state its commitment to cooperate with the USHMM to promote Holocaust education; however, observers said the general history curricula continued not to provide a mandatory class on the country's Holocaust history. The high school course "History of the Jews – The Holocaust" remained optional.

The government also facilitated USHMM access to the country's national archives. Archival institutions such as the Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives continued implementing cooperation agreements with the USHMM and provided the museum copies of historical records.

On December 6, the Bucharest Tribunal rescinded the Bucharest City Council's decision to transfer a building to the Wiesel Institute for the future Museum of Jewish History and the Holocaust. An individual challenged the council's decision, stating that the council had not met procedural criteria and the intended museum lacked merit. In September the Wiesel Institute had launched a public tender for the design of the new Jewish history museum's permanent exhibition. In 2017 the Wiesel Institute took possession of a building in central Bucharest transferred to it by the Bucharest General Council to build the museum.

Pursuant to its pledge to implement the recommendations of the Wiesel Commission report, the government again commemorated the annual National Holocaust Remembrance Day on October 9, marking the day when Romanian authorities began deporting the country's Jews to Transnistria, with a wreath-laying ceremony at the Holocaust Memorial in Bucharest. In his remarks, the president referred to anti-Semitism and Holocaust-era legislation, stating, "Such policies are today unconceivable for a society strongly attached to democratic principles and rule of law. Discrimination against a minority who does not hold the same beliefs, values, religion, or origin as the majority is an approach that reminds us of the dark years of dictatorships....Many European democracies are facing extremism, populism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia and for this reason, our country will act against these toxic scourges."

The Wiesel Institute continued to organize training courses on the history of the Holocaust for teachers, police officers, and other professionals. In September the Ministry of Foreign Affairs launched a project called "The Romanian National Expert Network on Genocide Prevention and Multidisciplinary Research on Mass

Graves,” aimed at bringing together prosecutors, criminal investigators, police officers, forensic experts, historians, and other professionals to promote research of mass graves and genocide prevention. In July the president promulgated the law on countering anti-Semitism, criminalizing the promotion of anti-Semitic ideas and the establishment of anti-Semitic organizations. ActiveWatch NGO asked the president not to promulgate the law, arguing that it does not focus on prevention, duplicates current legislation that prosecutors have never adequately enforced, and does not respect the proportionality between the restriction on free speech and the need to counter anti-Semitism. Jewish organizations said they favored the new law. Self-defined far-right groups criticized the law and argued there was no antisemitism 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 continued not to allow them to bury their dead in ROC or public cemeteries or otherwise continued to restrict such burials by requiring the burials take place in isolated sections of a cemetery or follow Orthodox rituals during the funeral services. The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported two such cases in villages in Moldova and Oltenia historical regions where the ROC priests did not allow them to bury the deceased in the local cemetery, forcing them to find another cemetery. The Christian Evangelical Church said such cases continued; however, they said local contacts would not provide the details because they feared ROC reprimands. Non-Orthodox religious groups continued to report difficulties in obtaining land to establish cemeteries.

According to Greek Catholic leaders, the ROC, in conjunction with local authorities, continued to deny the Greek Catholic Church access to the ROC cemetery in Sapanta, which had previously belonged to the Greek Catholic Church.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported the Body of Expert and Licensed Accountants of Romania continued to schedule exams on Saturdays without providing the option for Seventh-day Adventist students to take the exams on another day.

A study released by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in October, based on a survey carried out among middle school and high school teachers, found that 32.4 percent of the teachers did not want persons belonging to a different religion as neighbors.

Twenty-two percent of the respondents rated Marshall Ion Antonescu's efforts to help his country as "good to very good." Antonescu was the country's leader during most of the Second World War and the primary individual responsible for implementing the Holocaust in the country.

On November 5, in the village of Tataraseni, Botosani County, 25 students from the Tataraseni public school participated together with three teachers at a wreath-laying ceremony on the bust of Antonescu located on private property. The Elie Wiesel Institute filed a complaint before the country school inspectorate; at year's end, the Institute had not received a response from the government.

According to UNHCR, local media outlets depicted largely Muslim refugees as a threat because of their religion. Conspiracy theories and antagonistic speech against Muslims appeared frequently on social networks.

Material promoting anti-Semitic views and glorifying Legionnaires also appeared in media, including on the internet. In February the *Justitiarul.ro* news website published an article claiming that Zionist Jews had a secret plan to colonize the country.

On August 3, an individual painted anti-Semitic and other offensive messages on the childhood home of Auschwitz survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel in Sighetu Marmatiei, including, "The Nazi kike rests in hell together with Hitler." The local office of the national police and the Prosecutor's Office attached to the Court of Sighetul Marmatiei started an investigation of the incident for the destruction of property and anti-Semitic acts. By year's end, authorities identified one suspect and ordered his psychiatric evaluation. Police did not release the name of the suspect, but according to press reports, the individual, Iustin Creanga, was schizophrenic.

At year's end, the case involving the destruction in 2017 of 10 tombstones in a Jewish cemetery in Bucharest was still pending before the Prosecutor's Office attached to the Sector 4 Bucharest Court. According to the MCA, in April 2017, vandals destroyed the tombstones. Police identified three juveniles allegedly responsible for the crime. Although the vandalism took place on Holocaust Remembrance Day, the police investigation found the perpetrators had acted without a specific motive. Jewish organizations did not publicly comment on the case.

At year's end, an investigation regarding anti-Semitic and Holocaust denial messages painted on the external wall of a synagogue in Cluj-Napoca remained pending before the Prosecutor's Office attached to the Court of Cluj-Napoca. In June 2017, the Jewish community in Cluj-Napoca notified police about the messages painted on a wall of the Memorial Temple of Deported Jews synagogue.

According to a Pew survey, 29 percent of respondents were willing to accept Muslims as family members, while 39 percent would accept Jews as family members. Seventy-four percent of respondents said it was very important or somewhat important to be a Christian to be truly part of the country's national identity.

Verbal attacks during the year holding a foreign Jewish philanthropist responsible for domestic problems had anti-Semitic connotations. Politicians and the media ascribed negative actions to him, such as controlling an "invisible army" and paying for activities of opposition parties.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement

Embassy officials continued to raise concerns about the slow pace of religious property restitution with the general secretary of the government and to facilitate meetings between the WJRO and the government to help speed the processes of property restitution and pensions for Holocaust survivors.

Embassy officials, representatives of the USHMM, and the Office of the Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues continued discussions with government ministers and political leaders about the restitution of Jewish private and communal property, Holocaust survivor pensions, and the status of heirless property. In meetings with President Iohannis, Prime Minister Danila, Bucharest Mayor Firea, and officials of the Ministry of Education, U.S. embassy officials expressed their support for the establishment of a Museum of Jewish History and the Holocaust.

The embassy continued to assist the USHMM's effort to access the country's national archives by engaging with various ministries and agencies. U.S. officials also continued to support the Wiesel Institute in establishing a museum on the history of Romanian Jews by raising the project in meetings with key officials, mentioning it at public speaking events and through the Ambassador's participation on the museum's consultative committee.

The Ambassador and other embassy officers continued to hold meetings with Muslim and Jewish community leaders to discuss ways of promoting religious diversity and curbing religious discrimination. Embassy officers also continued to meet with officials of the ROC to discuss issues of religious freedom and tolerance.

The Ambassador participated in several events commemorating the Holocaust in Bucharest, Zalau, and Sighet. In October at a ceremony for National Holocaust Commemoration Day, the Ambassador spoke about the resurgence of intolerance in the region and laid a wreath.

The embassy used social media to emphasize respect for religious freedom by posting on its Facebook page links to remarks by the Secretary of State and information about religious freedom events organized by the Department of State. On International Religious Freedom Day, held on October 27, the embassy posted on its Facebook page a video depicting embassy employees speaking about religious equality and respect for religious diversity.