

# ROMANIA 2021 INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REPORT

## Executive Summary

The constitution prohibits restricting freedom of conscience and belief, as well as forcing an individual to espouse a religious belief contrary to the individual's convictions. It stipulates all religions are independent from the state, and religious groups have the freedom to organize "in accordance with their own statutes." According to the law on religious freedom and religious denominations, the state recognizes the "important role" of the Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the history of the country, but it also recognizes the role of "other churches and denominations." The law specifies a three-tiered classification of religious organizations. During the year, the government approved one application for registration of religious associations, compared with four in 2020. In March, April, and May, the government waived COVID-19-related night curfew measures, allowing worshippers to attend Easter, Passover, and Ramadan services, stating the exemption was granted because religious activities were essential. In October, a bishop told worshippers not to "rush to get vaccinated." Following the bishop's statement, police placed him under criminal investigation for spreading "dangerous disinformation." There were continued reports of the slow pace of restitution of confiscated properties, especially to the Greek Catholic Church and the Jewish community. The National Authority for Property Restitution (NAPR), the government agency responsible for overseeing the restitution process, reported the Special Restitution Commission (SRC) had approved 23 requests for the restitution of "immovable properties" (land or buildings) to religious denominations, approved compensation in 42 cases, and rejected 471 other claims during the year, compared with 26 approved requests for restitution, 57 approved compensations cases, and 500 rejected claims in 2020. All the claims were submitted before the 2006 deadline. In 28 cases, the filers withdrew their claims. According to data provided by NAPR, the number of cases the SRC reviewed decreased from 816 in 2020 to 665. In February, a Bucharest court found former Romanian Intelligence Service officer Vasile Zarnescu guilty of Holocaust denial and sentenced him to a deferred prison sentence of 13 months and two years' probation. In February, the website [incorectpolitic.com](http://incorectpolitic.com) published a written interview with Corvin Lupu, an associate professor at the public Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, who used antisemitic slurs, including the word *jidan*, the Romanian equivalent of "kike," made statements distorting the history of the Holocaust, accused Jews of using the Holocaust for financial benefits, and blamed them for the rise of communism in the country. In March, National Liberal Party (PNL) lawmaker Daniel Gheorghe delivered remarks in parliament glorifying Mircea Vulcanescu, a convicted war

criminal who, according to the Wiesel Institute, supported antisemitic policies as a cabinet member in the government of World War II dictator Ion Antonescu. In May, the government approved a two-year national strategy and action plan to combat antisemitism, xenophobia, radicalization, and hate speech. Members of the Jewish community welcomed the strategy, while some antisemitic groups said the plan was the result of a Jewish-led conspiracy to hide the truth about the Holocaust and destroy Romanian identity. In January, Prime Minister Florin Cîtu appointed Alexandru Muraru as the government's Special Representative for Combating Antisemitism and Xenophobia and Promoting the Memory of the Holocaust and Communism.

Some minority religious groups, including the Greek Catholic and the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, continued to report ROC priests and adherents at times blocked their access to cemeteries. Material promoting antisemitic views, glorifying Legionnaires, an antisemitic group founded in 1927 and also known as the Legion of the Archangel Michael, and messages promoting Holocaust denial and relativism continued to appear on the internet. In March, the director of the Jewish State Theater received by email a letter with antisemitic slurs and death threats against her children, as well as threats to set fire to the theater. In September, media reported that unknown persons vandalized a memorial located in the city of Bistrita, dedicated to Jews deported to Auschwitz and Birkenau. According to a study released by the Wiesel Institute in April, several articles published online stated Jews or Israel were responsible for manufacturing harmful COVID-19 vaccines and were profiting from the health crisis. In September, the Brussels-based nongovernmental organization (NGO) Action and Protection League issued the results of its European antisemitism survey, which found that 14 percent of 1,000 respondents ages 18-75 in Romania said they had negative feelings towards Jews.

U.S. embassy officials continued to advocate with the government for property restitution and religious tolerance. The Charge d'Affaires and a senior embassy official participated in several Holocaust commemorations and spoke out against antisemitism. Using its Facebook page, the embassy emphasized respect for religious freedom and paid tribute to Holocaust victims. Embassy officials met with leaders of the Romanian Orthodox Church, the Jewish community, and the Greek Catholic Church to discuss ways to promote religious freedom and interfaith dialogue.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 21.2 million (midyear 2021). 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. According to the Greek Catholic Church, since the time of the census, a significant number of persons whose Greek Catholic families were forced to covert during the Communist regime rediscovered their roots and joined the Greek Catholic Church. Other religious groups include Old Rite Russian Christians; Protestants, including Reformed Protestants, Pentecostals, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Evangelical Lutherans, and Evangelical Augustans; Jews; Muslims; Jehovah's Witnesses; Baha'is; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Zen Buddhists; the Family (God's Children); the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (Unification Church); the Church of Scientology; and the International Society of Krishna Consciousness. Atheists and nonbelievers represent less than 1 percent of the population.

According to the 2011 census, Old Rite Russian Christians are mainly located in Moldavia and Dobrogea. Of the 64,337 Muslims counted in the 2011 census, 43,279 live in the southeast near Constanta. Most Greek Catholics reside in Transylvania. Protestants of various denominations and Roman Catholics reside primarily in Transylvania. Orthodox and ethnic Ukrainian Greek Catholics live mostly in the north. Orthodox ethnic Serbs are primarily in Banat. Members of the Armenian Apostolic Church are concentrated in Moldavia and the south. Virtually all members of the Protestant Reformed and Unitarian Churches of Transylvania are ethnic Hungarians. More than half of the Roman Catholic and Evangelical Lutheran Churches in Transylvania are composed of ethnic Hungarians. Approximately 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 on religious freedom and religious denominations specifies the state's recognition of the "important role of the

Romanian Orthodox Church” as well as the role of “other churches and denominations as recognized by the national history” of the country.

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

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 law on religion was enacted in 2006: the ROC, Orthodox Serb Bishopric of Timisoara, Roman Catholic Church, Greek Catholic Church, Old Rite Russian Christian (Orthodox) Church, Reformed (Protestant) Church, Christian Evangelical Church, Romanian Evangelical Church, Evangelical Augustan Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church, Unitarian Church, Baptist Church, Pentecostal Church, Seventh-day Adventist Church, Armenian Apostolic Church, Federation of Jewish Communities, Muslim Denomination (Islam), and Jehovah’s Witnesses.

For additional organizations to obtain recognition as religious denominations, the law specifies they must demonstrate 12 years of continuous activity beginning in 2006. A religious association is then eligible to apply for the status of religious denomination if it has a membership of at least 0.1 percent of the population as counted at the most recent census (approximately 20,120 persons).

The law defines a religious association as an organization of at least 300 citizens who share and practice the same faith and has attained legal status through registration with the Registry of Religious Associations in the office of the clerk of

the court where the main branch of the association is located. To register, religious associations must submit to the government their 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. 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 NGOs, which require a minimum membership of three individuals. Such civil associations are not required to submit members' personal data.

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

Religious denominations are eligible for state financial and other support. They have the right to teach religion classes in public schools, receive government funds to build places of worship, 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," which the law does not define.

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

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

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

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

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

The law allows clergy from recognized religious denominations to minister to military personnel. This includes the possibility of clergy to function within the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, Intelligence Service, Foreign Intelligence Service, Protection and Guard Service, Special Telecommunications Service, and General Directorate for Penitentiaries. Under various other arrangements, clergy

of recognized religious denominations, and in some cases religious associations, may enter hospitals, orphanages, and retirement homes to undertake religious activities. Religious denominations and religious associations may undertake activities in penitentiaries, subject to approval by the director of the detention facility.

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

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

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

The law establishes a points system of compensation in cases where in-kind 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 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 World War II and the Communist era and lowers the burden of proof for the previous owners or their heirs to obtain restitution. The law designates the 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. According to the country's various civil codes adopted from 1939 on, heirless property and unclaimed property devolve to the government.

A law passed in 2020 prioritizes compensation to Holocaust survivors for immovable properties confiscated during the Communist regime. Under the law, NAPR must make a one-time compensation payment to successful claimants who are Holocaust survivors, as opposed to other claimants who receive compensation in several tranches over a period of five years. The law expands access to prioritized processing of claims by persons residing outside the European Union who can prove their status as Holocaust survivors with documents issued by an entity designated by the government of their country of residence.

Romanian and foreign citizens persecuted based on ethnic criteria between 1940 and 1945, defined in the law to include Jews, are entitled to a monthly pension. The amount of the pension varies, depending on the type and length of persecution endured. The pension is available to survivors and their families who are no longer Romanian citizens, thus entitling U.S. citizen Holocaust survivors and U.S. citizen family members of Holocaust victims to the same benefits as Romanian citizens.

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

A law passed in May makes children of Holocaust victims and survivors eligible for a monthly compensation. The law also applies to persons who do not have Romanian citizenship or do not reside in the country.

By law, religious education is optional in both public and private schools. Each of the 18 legally recognized religious denominations is entitled to offer religion classes, based on its own religious teachings, in schools. The Ministry of Education drafts the religious education curriculum for religious education in cooperation with all religious denominations to ensure the accuracy of the teachings. A denomination may offer classes regardless of the number of students

adhering to the denomination in a school. The law allows for exceptions where the right of students to attend religion classes cannot be implemented “for objective reasons,” without specifying what these reasons may be.

Under the law, participation in religion classes is not obligatory. Parents of students younger than age 18 must 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 submit a certificate from the denomination to receive academic credit.

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

The law forbids proselytizing in public and private schools. If teachers proselytize, the school management determines the appropriate discipline, 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; from age 16, a person has the right to choose her or 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 (\$230-\$22,900), depending on whether the victim is an individual or a community.

According to amendments to a law that went into effect in 2019, deceased adherents of Judaism are exempted from autopsy upon the request of their families or the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania and if law enforcement determines there are no suspicious circumstances surrounding their death.

By law, antisemitism is defined as a perception of Jews expressed in the form of anti-Jewish hatred, as well as speech and physical acts motivated by hatred that target Jews, non-Jews or their belongings, Jewish community institutions, or Jewish places of worship. Penalties for publicly promoting antisemitic ideas and doctrines or manufacturing and disseminating antisemitic symbols range from

three months to three years' imprisonment and the loss of certain rights such as the right to vote and run for election. Penalties for establishing antisemitic organizations range from three to 10 years of imprisonment and the loss of certain rights.

The law prohibits the establishment of fascist, Legionnaire (the country's interwar fascist organization), racist, or xenophobic organizations, which it defines in part as groups that promote violence, religiously motivated hatred, or extremist nationalism, the latter term undefined. Penalties for establishing such organizations range from three to 10 years of 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 (\$45,900). Publicly promoting 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 antisemitic, fascist, Legionnaire, racist, or xenophobic ideas, worldviews, or doctrines.

The criminal code cites religious motivation as an aggravating factor in a crime, which allows courts to impose the maximum special sentence for that particular crime. If the maximum special sentence is insufficient, courts may impose up to two more years of imprisonment, but not more than one third of the maximum special sentence. In case of criminal fines, courts may additionally impose up to one third of the maximum special fine provided by the law for that crime.

The law allows religious workers from legally recognized religious organizations to enter and remain in the country under an extended-stay visa. Visa applicants must receive approval 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

As of November, the government had approved one application for religious association status, compared with four religious associations in 2020. The approved application was for the Grace Association of Roma in Oltenia. As of November, 41 entities with diverse religious affiliations were registered as religious associations, compared with 40 in 2020.

Some small 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.

In March, April, and May, the government waived COVID-19-related night curfew measures, allowing worshippers to attend Easter, Passover, and Ramadan services. Regulations adopted by the National Committee for Emergency Situation in October to contain the spread of COVID-19 exempted religious ceremonies and collective prayers from any restrictions. According to Ministry of Interior State Secretary Raed Arafat, the exemption was granted because religious activities were considered essential. Public figures such as journalist Cristian Tudor Popescu criticized the measure, stating it would lead to further spread of COVID-19. Throughout the year, the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations and Prime Minister Ciu met several times with leaders of religious denominations to discuss COVID-19-related guidelines. In October, Bishop Ambrose of Giurgiu told worshippers not to “rush to get vaccinated.” Following the bishop’s statement, police placed him under criminal investigation for spreading “dangerous disinformation.”

In October, the mayor of Sacel, Maramures County, sent an official letter to a Greek Catholic individual accusing him of establishing a “clandestine” Greek Catholic place of worship in his home and trying to recruit adherents. The mayor also threatened to sue that person for damages and compensation related to a court decision ordering the town to return two previously confiscated properties to the Greek Catholic Bishopric of Maramures. Following the incident, the Greek Catholic Bishopric of Maramures issued a press release stating that the place of worship in Sacel was a legally established Greek Catholic parish and that the town had a historical Greek Catholic presence. The press release also noted that despite a court final decision ordering the town to return the confiscated properties, the

local government of Sacel refused for years to enforce the ruling. The bishopric also expressed concerns regarding pressure, harassment, and threats against Greek Catholics who wanted to practice their faith freely.

In October, the Targu-Mures Court of Appeal nullified a 2019 decision by the town of Darmanesti establishing ownership of a World War I cemetery in which predominantly Hungarian Catholic World War I soldiers were believed to be buried. The cemetery was the site of 2019 protests and tensions between ethnic Hungarians and ethnic Romanians over the construction of a monument and placement of Orthodox-style crosses on the graves of Hungarian Catholic soldiers. In December 2020, the Moinesti court repealed a prosecutorial decision to dismiss the inquiry into the cemetery incident and ordered the Moinesti prosecutor's office to resume criminal investigations for property damage, incitement to hatred and discrimination, and breach of public peace. In April, the General Prosecutor's Office stated that it had taken over the investigation.

In March, the Constitutional Court ruled that the bill entitling original owners and their inheritors to compensation based on current-day market prices, rather than on 2013 market prices as provided for in an earlier government decision, was unconstitutional. According to representatives of the Jewish community and the Greek Catholics, following the Constitutional Court ruling, the government provided compensation for confiscated properties based on 2013 market prices, which were significantly lower than current-day market prices.

There were continued reports of the slow pace of restitution of confiscated properties, especially to the Greek Catholic Church and the Jewish community. NAPR SRC had approved 23 requests for the restitution of "immovable properties" (land or buildings) to religious denominations, approved compensation in 42 cases, and rejected 471 other claims during the year, compared with 26 approved requests for restitution, 57 approved compensations cases, and 500 rejected claims in 2020. All the claims were submitted before the 2006 deadline. In 28 cases, the filers withdrew their claims. According to data provided by NAPR, the number of cases the SRC reviewed decreased from 816 in 2020 to 665.

According to NAPR, religious denominations appealed in courts 76 decisions the SRC issued during the year, compared with 62 in 2020. The Roman Catholic Church made seven appeals (five in 2020); the ROC made 24 (12 in 2020); the Greek Catholics made 16 (16 in 2020); the Evangelical Augustinian Church made 17 (six in 2020); and the Jewish community made two (seven in 2020). Information concerning court decisions on these cases was unavailable. The

Romanian Orthodox Church reported that the government had returned an estimated 7 percent of the properties confiscated during the Communist regime.

During the year, NAPR reviewed 305 claims submitted by the Greek Catholic Church, compared with 557 claims in 2020. NAPR approved two requests for restitution to the Greek Catholic Church and approved compensation in two other cases. Greek Catholic 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 only through a joint commission representing the two Churches and based on “the will of the believers from the communities that possess these properties.” During the Communist regime, all places of worship and parish houses were transferred to the ROC, and most other properties (land and buildings) to the state. According to Greek Catholic officials, there was no progress on forming a joint commission by year’s end, a request the Greek Catholic Church made 20 years ago.

The Greek Catholic Church continued to report delays on restitution lawsuits. Church representatives stated there were no court decisions on Greek Catholic restitution cases again during the year and that in several cases, local government committees in charge of transferring the ownership of certain lands to the Greek Catholic Church following a restitution decision failed to do so. The Greek Catholic parish of Chiheru de Jos Village in Mures County reported that the local government failed to enforce a final court decision issued in 2015 that returned to the Greek Catholic Church 120 hectares (297 acres) of forest and 20 hectares (49 acres) of other land.

Representatives of the Greek Catholic civic group ACUM (the word “now” in Romanian) continued to state that history textbooks and academic publications distorted or minimized the history of the Greek Catholic Church. ACUM also reported that official websites of central and local government institutions published biased and false information about the Greek Catholic Church. According to ACUM, in most cases local governments did not invite Greek Catholic Church representatives to public events, while government officials invited ROC representatives. The group also reported that government officials deliberately overlooked the religious affiliation of historically important Greek Catholic leaders when commemorating them.

Restitution of a property in Bixad that was previously restored to the Greek Catholic Church by the government and confirmed by earlier court decisions

continued to be delayed because of a revived claim for the property by the Satu Mare County Council filed in 2016. At year's end, the case remained pending.

Although implementing regulations to officially prioritize property restitution cases for Holocaust survivors remained pending, NAPR approved priority status for 114 such applications. Since the passage of the legislation, NAPR had awarded compensation to Holocaust survivors in 103 cases, rejected the claims in 11 cases, and not issued a decision in 49 cases at year's end.

The SRC approved 17 pending claims from previous years by the Jewish community – all through compensation – and rejected 38 others, compared with 21 during the same period in 2020. In 14 other cases, compared with nine in 2020, claimants withdrew their requests. Religious groups continued to state that it was difficult to obtain required documentation from the National Archives demonstrating proof of ownership in time to meet the 120-day deadline to submit an appeal. The Caritatea Foundation continued to state the claims procedure was too bureaucratic because the SRC often requested the submission of numerous additional documents, which sometimes were found only in government-managed archives, giving Jewish claimants insufficient time to meet the deadline for document submission. Caritatea stated access to government-managed archives holding the required documents for the restitution process remained difficult.

According to the Caritatea Foundation, as of December, the NCREC issued 16 final approvals on decisions during the year. Caritatea stated it challenged eight of these decisions because the compensation amounts awarded were significantly lower than the value of confiscated property. As of December, 99 decisions were pending final approval, of which 27 had been issued before 2013, according to Caritatea.

According to the Diocese of Transylvania of the Reformed Church, delays continued in addressing its property restitution lawsuits. According to data provided by NAPR, since 2002, the SRC had reviewed 930 of the 1,191 claims submitted by the Reformed Church and had approved 521 requests for compensation or restitution in kind.

The Diocese of Transylvania of the Reformed Church said the government continued to reject its restitution claims on the grounds the entities registered as the former property owners were educational institutions of the Reformed Church and not the contemporary churches. Church leaders said the Communist regime had dismantled the former educational institutions while confiscating their property,

meaning the former property owners no longer existed as such, but the contemporary churches, as the successors to the dismantled educational institutions, were in effect the same entities whose property the Communist regime had seized. During the year, the SRC rejected a claim submitted by the Transylvania diocese on the grounds that the claimed building belonged to the Reformed School in the city of Odorheiu Secuiesc and not to the diocese. According to the diocese, however, the SRC's decision was unjustified, because the documents attesting the ownership of the building, which were issued in 1891, mentioned the Reformed Church as the owner and the Reformed School as the building's user.

According to the Transylvania Reformed Diocese, the Cluj-Napoca municipality repeatedly refused to enforce a court decision returning several previously confiscated buildings to the diocese. The Cluj-Napoca municipality also submitted to the land record office a request to be registered as the rightful owner of a building it confiscated from the Reformed School in 1948. The diocese reported that the land record still listed the Reformed School of Cluj as the owner of that building because, at the time of the confiscation, the government had not registered its ownership of the building.

In September, Zoltan Balog, the president of the General Synod of the Hungarian Reformed Church which represents Reformed Churches in several countries, including Romania, issued a statement condemning a criminal investigation against Bishops Istvan Csury and Bela Kato of the Reformed Church in Romania. According to the statement, the prosecutors started an investigation against the two bishops on charges of document forgery in a case concerning the restitution of a Wesseleny College building in Zalau that had belonged to the Reformed Church in Transylvania. Balog speculated that the investigation aimed to block church property restitution.

Twenty-one claims submitted by the Roman Catholic Church were resolved as of year's end, compared with 20 in 2020. The government granted compensation or restitution in kind in six cases and denied 13 claims, compared with five and 13 claims, respectively, in 2020. The government reviewed 22 claims submitted by the Reformed Church and denied 13 others, compared with 38 and 19 claims, respectively, in 2020.

During the year, nearly 90 percent of schoolchildren continued to take religion classes taught by government employees appointed by the ROC and in accordance with the ROC faith. According to some NGOs and parents' associations, this

enrollment continued to be the result of pressure by the ROC, as well as the failure of school directors to offer parents alternatives to religion classes.

The Greek Catholic Group ACUM reported that in some cases teachers discriminated against Greek Catholic students and pressured them to take religion classes taught according to the ROC faith. Some schools reportedly did not offer Greek Catholic students alternatives to religion classes taught according to the ROC faith.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported that the Iuliu Hatieganu University of Medical Science and Pharmacy in Cluj scheduled admission examinations on Saturday without providing the option to Seventh-day Adventist candidates to take the exams on another day. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also reported that several public hospitals in the cities of Bucharest, Ploiesti, Giurgiu, Galati, Deva, and Turda rejected requests by Seventh-day Adventists to take a day off and work on Saturday. The Church reported, however, that the Body of Expert and Licensed Accountants of Romania agreed to provide the option for Seventh-day Adventist students to take the exams on a day other than Saturday.

Historians and Holocaust experts said the general history curricula provided few mandatory classes on the country's Holocaust history. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, however, the mandatory curricula for primary, middle, and high schools included explicit references to the Holocaust or other more general topics that allowed teachers to teach about it. A high school course, "History of the Jews – The Holocaust," remained an optional elective class. During the 2020-21 school year, 1,650 students took the course. According to the National Institute of Statistics, there were approximately 622,000 students enrolled in high school education during the 2020-21 school year. In November, the parliament passed a bill sponsored by Jewish Member of Parliament Silviu Vexler making "The History of Jews – The Holocaust" a compulsory course for all high school students by 2023. President Klaus Iohannis signed the bill on November 25.

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

Through a declaration adopted on March 31, the parliament stated that antisemitic incidents were on the rise and condemned attempts to glorify Holocaust-era war criminals.

According to the NGO Center for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism in Romania (MCA), prosecution of antisemitic speech and Holocaust denial continued to be infrequent. The MCA stated that throughout the years, individuals who engaged in antisemitic acts were not held legally accountable, and that law enforcement failed to prosecute those who committed various acts of vandalism directed against cemeteries, synagogues, and memorials. On February 4, through a nonfinal ruling, the Bucharest Sector Three Court found former intelligence service officer Vasile Zarnescu guilty of Holocaust denial and sentenced him to a deferred prison sentence of 13 months and two years' probation.

The Bucharest Court of Appeal confirmed a previous prosecutorial decision to drop a 2014 case against the self-declared leader of the antisemitic Legionnaire Movement, stating there was no public interest in prosecuting the suspect and that his behavior had a limited impact and did not lead to violence or material damage. The charges were for the public use of fascist, racist, and xenophobic symbols, according to the Wiesel Institute. In 1940-41, the Legionnaire Movement had adopted antisemitic legislation and carried out various antisemitic attacks, including a pogrom in Bucharest in 1941.

Media reported some local authorities continued to allow streets, organizations, schools, and libraries to be named after persons convicted of Nazi-era war crimes or crimes against humanity and to allow the display of public statues and busts depicting persons convicted of war crimes. Several cities and towns continued to name streets after Ion Antonescu, the country's dictator during World War II, and some local governments refused to change the name despite requests from the Wiesel Institute. After the Wiesel Institute repeatedly requested the Constanta municipality to change the name of Ion Antonescu Street in February, the mayor of Constanta, Vergil Chitac, told media that there were various controversies and contradictory assessments of Antonescu and that the municipality would consider renaming the street after academics examined the topic. The Wiesel Institute condemned Chitac's statements, stating there was no controversy about the role Antonescu had in the extermination of Jews and Roma. In June, the Constanta City Council unanimously voted to rename the street after Constantin Costachescu, a submarine commander in the Romanian navy during World War II.

In April, the Iasi municipal administration organized a ceremony unveiling a bust of Octavian Goga, a writer and antisemitic politician who in 1938, when serving as prime minister, initiated laws stripping Jews of their citizenship. The MCA condemned the municipal administration's decision and the participation of Iasi mayor Mihai Chirica in the ceremony. In July, the administration added a plaque

on Goga's bust with the wording, "Regrettably, his political activity was unfortunate for Romania's history because he was a fascist and antisemitic militant." The MCA criticized the added wording and stated that the bust should have been removed.

In February, local councilors of the town of 1 Decembrie in Ilfov County changed the name of Ion Antonescu Street. The local government in Cluj-Napoca, however, chose not to change the name of a street named in 2017 for Radu Gyr, a commander of the Legionnaire movement and apologist for antisemitism, whom a court convicted in 1945 of war crimes for "contributing to the political aims of Hitlerism and Fascism."

The Wiesel Institute continued to organize several online and in-person educational activities for teachers, students, and police officers; informed the public about the Holocaust; and posted several teaching materials on the history of the Holocaust in the country on its web page.

In May, the government approved a two-year national strategy and action plan to combat antisemitism, xenophobia, radicalization, and hate speech. The plan's expressed goals were to seek to improve data collection on antisemitic incidents, revamp training programs for law enforcement and magistrates, update the school curriculum on the Holocaust, and develop relevant cultural programs. The strategy mandated the Elie Wiesel Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania and several other agencies and ministries to cooperate with Jewish community in implementing the action plan. Members of the Jewish community welcomed the strategy, while some antisemitic groups posted on social media that the plan was the result of a Jewish-led conspiracy to hide the truth about the Holocaust and destroy Romanian identity.

In January, the National Council for Combating Discrimination imposed a fine of 5,000 lei (\$1,100) on Iulian Bulai, a parliamentarian of the Save Romania Union, a party self-characterized as center right, for several statements he made in 2019 about Jesus Christ that, according to the council, were hostile, humiliating, and degrading towards Christians. In his statements, Bulai had raised awareness regarding vulnerable children and compared them to Jesus, whom he described as a "a poor kid" coming from a "strange family," consisting of a "surrogate mother and a father who accepted paternity without contributing to it." Several observers criticized the council's decision, stating that it infringed on the freedom to express opinions about religion. In August, the Bacau Court of Appeal issued a ruling repealing the fine imposed by the council on Bulai.

In February, the website *incorectpolitic.com* published a written interview with Corvin Lupu, an associate professor at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. Throughout the interview, Lupu used antisemitic slurs, including the word *jidani*, the Romanian equivalent of “kike,” and made statements distorting the history of the Holocaust, accused Jews of using the Holocaust for financial benefit, and blamed them for the rise of communism in the country. Following a complaint by the Wiesel Institute, the university responded that Lupu’s statements were complex and required a detailed analysis and that they would carry out such an in-depth analysis if he renewed his request to teach in the next school year.

On March 3, PNL Member of Parliament (MP) Daniel Gheorghe delivered remarks in parliament glorifying Mircea Vulcanescu, a convicted war criminal who, according to the Wiesel Institute, supported antisemitic policies as a cabinet member in the government of World War II dictator Antonescu. During a March 8 Senate session, Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (AUR) Senator Sorin Lavric made antisemitic statements, referring to a conspiracy theory that Jews initiated and promoted communism. Lavric’s statements were made in response to Jewish MP Silviu Vexler’s criticism of statements made by some AUR MPs, including Lavric, glorifying Holocaust-era war criminals and members of the Legionnaire Movement. AUR posted Lavric’s speech on its official Facebook page and described it as part of the fight for the country’s history and the nation’s soul.

On January 27, President Iohannis hosted a public ceremony to decorate Holocaust survivors, during which he renewed his commitment to preserve the memory of the Holocaust. 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 11, marking the day when Romanian authorities began deporting the country’s Jews to Transnistria, in current-day Moldova. To mark the day, presidential advisor Catalina Galer delivered remarks on behalf of President Iohannis paying tribute to the victims of the Holocaust and condemning contemporary antisemitism and hate speech. The Wiesel Institute held a wreath-laying ceremony at the Holocaust Memorial in Bucharest, which several government officials attended.

In the October 11 remarks delivered by presidential advisor Galer on National Holocaust Remembrance Day, President Iohannis stated that the planned Jewish History and Holocaust Museum was “blocked” and asked the government to take serious measures to ensure that it would be established. In November, the Wiesel Institute, tasked to establish the museum, received the necessary funding from the

government to conclude a contract for the design of the museum's building and permanent exhibition.

The State Secretariat for Religious Denominations provided funding for the publication of several books on the history and heritage of religious groups in the country. Throughout the year, Baptists, Evangelical Augustans, and Unitarians received such funding.

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 to prevent them from burying their dead in ROC or public cemeteries, including access to the ROC cemetery in Sapanta that previously belonged to the Greek Catholic Church, or otherwise continued to restrict such burials by requiring they take place in isolated sections of a cemetery or follow Orthodox rituals. In the town of Olari, Prahova County, the local government did not respond to requests by the Seventh-day Adventist Church to gain access to the cemetery.

Representatives of the Christian Evangelical Church said such cases included them as well, although local observers did not always provide details because they said they feared ROC reprisals. ACUM stated that ROC priests often pressured the families of deceased Greek Catholics to bury their dead according to ROC rituals or tried to prevent Greek Catholic priests from performing the rite of Holy Unction for dying persons. Representatives of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reported that in some cases, ROC priests disrupted Seventh-day Adventist funerals and that in the town of Olari, Prahova County, the local ROC priest incited hatred against religious minorities during church services.

According to Greek Catholics, some ROC archdioceses continued to distort the history of the Greek Catholic Church in their public messaging. They said that on ROC websites of the ROC deaneries of Bistrita, Nasaud, and Beclean, in the northern part of the country, the ROC presented historical details about several formerly Greek Catholic churches that the Communist regime had transferred to the ROC without mentioning the churches and some of their previous priests or that their founders were Greek Catholic.

On March 18, the director of the Jewish State Theater, Maia Morgenstern, stated on social media that during a meeting with representatives of public theaters and

cultural institutions, one of the participants used antisemitic slurs. On March 27, Morgenstern received by email a letter that included antisemitic slurs and death threats against her children, as well as threats to set fire to the Jewish State Theater. On March 29, police announced they had identified the writer of the threats, placed him under judicial supervision, and initiated a criminal investigation.

Material promoting antisemitic views and glorifying Legionnaires, as well as messages promoting Holocaust denial and relativism, continued to appear on the internet. According to a study released by the Wiesel Institute in April, several articles published online claimed that Jews or the state of Israel were profiting from the COVID-19 health crisis and were manufacturing harmful vaccines. According to the same study, most antisemitic hate speech on social media included Jewish conspiracy theories, including alleging plans to create a worldwide state controlled by Jews and led by the anti-Christ.

In January, the National Council for Combating Discrimination imposed a fine of 5,000 lei (\$1,100) on one of the persons who in 2020 recorded a video of themselves placing a mask on a statue of Elie Wiesel in Bucharest and saying that he was responsible for spreading a virus that destroyed lives and had a catastrophic effect on the country's history and society. According to the council's decision, that person's acts constituted discrimination.

In March, media reported that unknown persons vandalized and painted messages on the walls of an ROC church located in Bucharest. The prosecutor's office attached to the Sector Three Court in Bucharest opened an investigation.

On September 12, media reported that unknown persons vandalized a memorial located in the city of Bistrita, in the northern part of the country, dedicated to Jews deported to Auschwitz and Birkenau. According to the Jewish community, police started an investigation and closed it after they learned that the persons who were responsible for the vandalism were minors who lacked legal culpability.

As of November, a criminal investigation of antisemitic messages painted in 2020 on a fence of a relative of a mayoral candidate in Suceava County was pending before the prosecutor's office attached to the Radauti court. The messages included the candidate's name, a swastika, and an antisemitic slur.

At year's end, a criminal investigation concerning the 2020 vandalism of a monument dedicated to the approximately 7,500 Jews transported to concentration

camps from Targu Mures was still pending before the prosecutor's office attached to the Targu Mures court.

At year's end, a lawsuit involving three suspects charged in 2019 with the desecration of a grave in a Jewish cemetery in Husi was pending before the Husi court. In 2020, the Prosecutor's Office of the Vaslui tribunal indicted three suspects for destroying dozens of headstones in the Jewish cemetery. According to media reports, in June, several teenagers smashed multiple windows of the 19th century synagogue in Orastie, located in the western part of the country. Orastie municipal authorities condemned the incident and notified law enforcement. Police identified the suspects and started a criminal investigation for destruction of property.

The MCA continued to report that online shops sold items, books, including *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and other publications promoting antisemitic messages.

In September, the Brussels-based NGO Action and Protection League issued the results of its European antisemitism survey based on data from December 2019-January 2020. According to the survey, 14 percent of 1,000 respondents ages 18-75 in Romania said they had negative feelings towards Jews. Twenty-five percent said they would be "totally uncomfortable" or "uncomfortable" with having Jewish neighbors. The survey cited stereotypical statements about Jews and asked respondents the degree to which they agreed or disagreed. The proportion who responded "strongly agree" or "tend to agree" with the following statements were: "the interests of Jews in this country are very different from the interests of the rest of the population" (28 percent); "there is a secret Jewish network that influences political and economic affairs in the world" (29 percent); "Jews have too much influence in this country" (19 percent); "Jews will never be able to fully integrate into this society" (22 percent); "Jews are more inclined than most to use shady practices to achieve their goals" (29 percent); "many of the atrocities of the Holocaust were often exaggerated by the Jews later" (28 percent); "Jews are also to blame for the persecutions against them" (20 percent); and "Jews exploit Holocaust victimhood for their own purposes" (31 percent).

#### **Section IV. U.S. Government Policy and Engagement**

Embassy officials continued to advocate with for improved property restitution processes. Embassy officials discussed with the government Special Representative for Combating Antisemitism and Xenophobia and Promoting the

Memory of the Holocaust and Communism ways to improve Holocaust-related education and to support the establishment of the Jewish History and Holocaust Museum. Embassy officials also met with the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations to highlight the importance of religious freedom and to discuss interfaith relations and the cooperation between the government and religious groups on COVID-19-related measures. The Special Envoy on Holocaust Issues advocated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for enhanced Holocaust-related remembrance and educational activities and the reconvening of a Holocaust-era property restitution working group, which had not met in the last two years. The working group consists of representatives of the World Jewish Restitution Organization, the Jewish Community, the Caritatea Foundation, and several government agencies, including NAPR and the General Secretariat of the Government.

Embassy officials continued to hold meetings with Muslim and Jewish leaders to discuss ways of promoting religious diversity and curbing religious discrimination. Embassy officers also met with ROC and Greek Catholic leaders to discuss issues of religious freedom, tolerance, and interreligious relations.

On January 27, the Charge d’Affaires participated in an online event with the Jewish Community in Zalau marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day and delivered remarks about the importance of Holocaust remembrance. In June, the Charge d’Affaires participated in a ceremony commemorating the 1941 Iasi pogrom, in which approximately 13,000 of the country’s Jews were killed and the remainder deported to concentration camps and delivered remarks raising awareness about Holocaust distortion and the importance of Holocaust education.

In October, a senior embassy official laid a wreath at a ceremony for National Holocaust Commemoration Day, held in Bucharest. The embassy also held an event on December 14 on Holocaust distortion and denial that included numerous high-level attendees within the government.

Using social media, the embassy emphasized respect for religious freedom, stressed the importance of combating antisemitism, and paid tribute to Holocaust victims. In July, the embassy posted a Facebook message on the Eid al-Adha holiday, recognizing the Muslim community’s contribution to interfaith harmony and its respect for religious freedom.

In June, the embassy posted Facebook messages regarding the anniversary of the 1941 Iasi pogrom. The embassy also helped organize and sponsored the annual

Elie Wiesel Study Tour in July, which provided students the opportunity to attend several online classes and to understand the political, social, and cultural forces that created the Holocaust.