

# ROMANIA 2019 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 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. In addition, civil associations wishing to perform religious functions may organize under a separate provision of the law. The government approved an application for one Christian association – The "Neemia" Christian Association in Brateius. 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 474 restitution claims for confiscated religious properties and approved 48, compared with 609 claims rejected and 52 approved in 2018; 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 government discrimination against them, including exclusive ROC representation at many government-sponsored events. In May a town with an ethnic Romanian majority erected a monument and Orthodox-style crosses in the Valea Uzului war cemetery, sparking protests by a neighboring, majority-Catholic town with an ethnic Hungarian majority. Security forces deployed at a counterprotest in June to keep the two sides apart. In October President Klaus Iohannis promulgated a law establishing a National Jewish History and Holocaust Museum.

Minority religious groups continued to report harassment of their congregations by ROC priests and adherents, including verbal harassment, along with the blocking of their access to cemeteries. In April media reported vandalism at a Jewish cemetery in the town of Husi, where individuals destroyed dozens of headstones. The president of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania stated the vandalism was the culmination of a series of anti-Semitic acts in the town; no suspects were detained. Some media outlets continued to depict largely Muslim migrants as a threat because of their religion. In March the news site evz.ro published an article stating that Muslim immigrants posed a lethal threat to European civilization. On February 26, the National Anti-Discrimination Council

released the results of a survey showing a majority of Romanians expressed high levels of distrust towards Muslims (68 percent), Jews (46 percent), and other religious minorities (58 percent). A European Commission (EC) Eurobarometer survey published in January reported 6 percent of respondents believed anti-Semitism was a problem in the country, and 67 percent did not. According to the findings of a separate EC study on perceptions of discrimination published in September, 43 percent of respondents believed discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was widespread in Romania, while 51 percent said it was rare.

The U.S. Ambassador at Large for Religious Freedom met with government officials to discuss anti-Semitism, Holocaust remembrance issues, and the general position of the Orthodox Church in the country. 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 Ludovic Orban, and other government officials, embassy officials continued to support efforts by the Elie Wiesel National Institute for the Study of the Holocaust in Romania (Wiesel Institute), assisted by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM), to establish a National Jewish History and Holocaust Museum. The Ambassador participated in Holocaust commemorations and spoke out against religious intolerance in the country. Using its Facebook page, the embassy emphasized respect for religious freedom and condemned anti-Semitic incidents.

## **Section I. Religious Demography**

The U.S. government estimates the population at 21.4 million (midyear 2019 estimate). According to a 2011 census by the government, 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, 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 accounted for 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 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 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. 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 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 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 (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 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 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 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. 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, with the exception of cemeteries belonging to local Jewish and Muslim communities. By law, non-Muslims and non-Jews are not entitled to be buried in Jewish or Muslim 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 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 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. 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 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.

Romanian and foreign citizens who were persecuted based on ethnic criteria between 1940 and 1945 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 rights as Romanian citizens.

A law that went into effect in July allows Holocaust survivors residing in foreign countries and 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 also exempts Holocaust survivors residing in foreign countries from having to physically submit their applications for compensation at the pension offices in the country and allows them to use other means of communication to apply.

By law, religious education in schools 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. 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 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 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; from age 16, a person 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 (\$235-\$23,500), depending on whether the victim is an individual or a community.

According to amendments to a law that went into effect in April, 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. The previous version of the law did not allow for such an exemption.

By law, anti-Semitism 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 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.

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' 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 (\$47,000). 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 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 approved one application for religious association status during the year – the "Neemia" Christian Association in Brateius – compared with two religious associations approved in 2018. As of December, 36 entities with diverse religious affiliations were registered as religious associations, up one from 35 in 2018.

Because religion and ethnicity are closely linked, it was difficult to categorize the following incidents as based solely on religious identity. In May the town of Darmanesti, located in the eastern part of the country, erected a monument and Orthodox-style crosses honoring the country's WWI soldiers believed to be buried in Valea Uzului war cemetery. The ethnic Hungarian community and officials of

the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (UDMR) from the neighboring town of Sanmartin, which has a large population of ethnic Hungarians, stated the Darmanesti mayor had “appropriated” the cemetery which, according to UDMR, was under the jurisdiction of Sanmartin. They also said the recently built Orthodox-style monuments honoring Romanian soldiers were placed on top of the graves of predominantly Catholic Hungarian soldiers.

On May 16, media outlets posted a video showing a group of Hungarian-speaking persons covering the crosses and monument to Romanian soldiers in black plastic bags. UDMR condemned the covering of crosses and called it a provocation meant to discredit the Hungarian community in Romania. On May 29, the mayor of Sanmartin closed the Valea Uzului military cemetery for 30 days. On June 6, hundreds of persons equipped with loudspeakers, including several ROC priests, arrived at the cemetery to commemorate the Romanian soldiers believed to be buried there. They were met by approximately 200 members of the Gendarmerie, an agency of the Ministry of the Interior in charge of ensuring public order, who positioned themselves between the ethnic Romanians and hundreds of ethnic Hungarians who would not allow the ethnic Romanians to enter the cemetery. Eventually, some ethnic Romanians forced their way into the cemetery, where they held a ceremony commemorating ethnic Romanian soldiers. Several observers reported that the commemoration resembled the ritual performed by members of the outlawed Legionnaire Movement to commemorate their deceased.

Baha’i leaders continued to seek options for the burial of deceased followers in accordance with their religious practices. They requested assistance from the State Secretariat for Religious Denominations to establish a cemetery, and from the local governments of Cluj-Napoca and Bucharest to acquire an appropriate lot. According to the Baha’i community, local governments told them their deceased followers could be buried in other cemeteries and a dedicated Baha’i cemetery was not needed. According to the Baha’i, some burial practices of existing cemeteries were contrary to the Baha’i tradition, so they preferred to have their own. Baha’is continued to be registered as a religious association and not as a denomination because they did not meet the minimum requirements for membership and activity.

Some minority 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 National Authority for Property Restitution (NAPR), the government agency responsible for overseeing the restitution process, reported the SRC had approved 14 requests for the restitution of “immovable properties” (land or buildings) to religious denominations, approved compensation in 34 cases, and rejected 474 other claims during the year, compared with 17 requests for restitution, 35 approved compensations cases, and 609 rejected claims in 2018. All of the claims were submitted before the 2006 deadline. In 14 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 1,212 in 2018 to 777.

According to NAPR, religious denominations appealed 63 decisions the SRC submitted to the courts during the year, compared with 53 in 2018. The Roman Catholic Church made four appeals (12 in 2018); the ROC made 24 (nine in 2018); the Greek Catholics made 18 (13 in 2018); the Evangelical Augustinian Church made four (two in 2018); and the Jewish community made 10 (12 in 2018). Information concerning court decisions on these cases was unavailable.

During the year, NAPR reviewed 335 claims submitted by the Greek Catholic Church, compared with 490 claims in 2018, but it did not restore any property to the Church or grant it compensation in any 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.

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

In November the civic group ACUM (the word “now” in Romanian) published an open letter to the president and prime minister calling for the establishment of a body to combat religious discrimination. The signatories stated that 30 years after the fall of Communism, the Greek-Catholic Church continued to be the victim of religious persecution that began in the 1940s. According to ACUM, 90 percent of its churches and assets confiscated during the communist regime had not been

returned; the ROC, via its media and communication channels, continued to campaign against Greek Catholics; Greek Catholic students were pressured to take ROC religion classes; history textbooks and academic publications distorted or minimized the history of the Greek Catholic Church; commemorations honoring important leaders from the country's history who were Greek Catholic deliberately overlooked those leaders' religious affiliation; and the ROC had not asked for forgiveness for Securitate collaborators who jailed, tortured, and killed Greek Catholic priests who refused to convert to the Romanian Orthodox faith. The government had not responded to the letter by year's end.

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 in light of a revived claim for the property by the Satu Mare County Council filed in 2016. 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 implementation regulations to officially prioritize property restitution cases for Holocaust survivors remained pending, NAPR approved priority status for 160 such applications. Since the passage of the legislation, NAPR has awarded compensation to Holocaust survivors in 76 cases, rejected the claims in nine cases, and had not issued a decision in 75 cases by year's end.

The SRC approved 10 pending claims from previous years by the Jewish community as of October – eight through compensation and two through restitution in kind – and rejected 61 others, compared with 16 during the same period in 2018. In 10 other cases, compared with 54 in 2018, 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 an appeal. The Caritatea Foundation stated the SRC continued to avoid assuming responsibility for restitution, preferring to pass decisions on to the courts and reportedly to avoid being potentially charged with making decisions on illegal claims. 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 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 Caritatea Foundation, the NCREC did not issue any final approval on decisions during the year, and 61 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.

A working group consisting of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania, Caritatea, and the WJRO had difficulty maintaining a dialogue with the government during the year, according to the WJRO. The working group said its standing proposals could help unblock or expedite the processing of remaining private and communal property claims. The government did not act on any of these proposals by year's end.

The Reformed Church also indicated continuing delays on restitution lawsuits. According to the Reformed Church, over the past 10 years, the SRC had reviewed only half of its claims, with 52 cases pending at year's end. The Reformed Church reported that since 2018, the SRC had rejected restitution claims on buildings previously owned by schools under the authority of the Reformed Church. According to the Reformed Church, the SRC said land records, some dating from the 19th century, listed the schools as rightful owners and not the Reformed Church.

The Reformed, Roman Catholic, 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. Fourteen claims submitted by the Roman Catholic Church were resolved as of year's end, compared with 12 in 2018. The government granted compensation or restitution in kind in eight cases and denied six claims, compared with five and seven claims, respectively, in 2018. The government reviewed six claims submitted by the Reformed Church and denied four others, compared with five and two claims, respectively, in 2018.

In January the Roman Catholic Church appealed to the High Court of Cassation and Justice to overturn an earlier rejection of the Church's claim for restitution of the Batthyaneum Library and an astronomical institute in Alba Iulia, important cultural and historical touchstones for the country dating back to the 19th century. The first hearing is scheduled for November 2021.

Nearly 90 percent of schoolchildren took religion classes offered by the ROC. According to 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.

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.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported the Faculty of Medical Science and Pharmacy in Iasi and 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. The Seventh-day Adventist Church also reported that despite their requests, public hospitals in Bucharest and Ploiesti did not change their work schedules to allow several employees to observe Saturday as the Sabbath.

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

According to the government-established Wiesel Institute, prosecution of anti-Semitic speech and Holocaust denial continued to be infrequent. Statistics released by the government for the first half of the year showed that the national-level Prosecutor General's Office had 42 unresolved cases. According to the Wiesel Institute, many of the cases included anti-Semitic elements. Of those cases, the office sent one case to trial; no information was available on the nature of the case. The 2014 case against the self-declared leader of the Legionnaire Movement for the public use of fascist, racist, and xenophobic symbols was still pending at year's end, according to the Wiesel Institute. In October the Bucharest Military Tribunal

accepted the proposal of the Bucharest Military Prosecutor's Office to drop the 2016 charges against a military officer who had posted on social media anti-Semitic language and a public appeal for someone to place a bomb at the Wiesel Institute "to kill the Jews there." The officer was ordered to perform 60 days of community service. According to media reports, the officer worked for the Romanian Intelligence Service. According to journalists and observers, the delay in the prosecution of these cases continued due to lengthy investigations and the lower priority law enforcement gave such investigations.

A law that went into effect in March allowed the declassification of some documents related to the Jewish community between 1938-1989 that are in the custody of the National Archives of Romania and the Archives of the General Secretariat of the Government. In March Member of Parliament (MP) Silviu Vexler, who represented the Jewish community and who sponsored the bill, stated many of these documents would shed light on unknown aspects of Jewish history during the Antonescu and communist dictatorships. According to several researchers, some of these documents may include significant details about Holocaust and communist-era confiscation of Jewish private and communal property.

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. According to the institute, several cities and towns continued to name streets after Ion Antonescu, Romania's dictator during WWII who was responsible for the Holocaust in Romania, and local governments refused to change the name despite requests from the institute. Similarly, the local government in Cluj-Napoca did not change 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." At year's end, the Ministry of Interior and local governments did not act on the institute's 2017 request to stop these practices in accordance with the law banning the "public worship of persons convicted of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide."

Several government officials continued to make comments widely viewed by Jewish organizations as "trivializing" the Holocaust. On August 2, during a ceremony commemorating the Roma Holocaust, then culture minister Veler-Daniel Breaz described the Holocaust as one of the "delicate moments, not to call them difficult or unpleasant, during which some minorities suffered." The leaders of the

Jewish community, academics, Roma, and human rights activists, as well as several politicians, criticized Breaz for his statements. On August 5, Dana Varga, an advisor to former prime minister Viorica Dancila, posted on her Facebook page photographs comparing President Iohannis, who is of ethnic-German heritage, to Adolf Hitler. Federation of Jewish Communities President Aurel Vainer, Jewish MP Vexler, the Wiesel Institute, Roma rights activists, and several members of the opposition condemned Varga's actions, with some asking for her resignation. In September media reported the director of the Constantin Brancusi National Museum in Targu Jiu had posted on social media materials promoting the Legionnaire Movement and Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, who was the organization's founder and leader.

The government continued to implement the recommendations of the 2004 report by the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania (Wiesel Commission) and to cooperate with the USHMM in promoting Holocaust education. On March 15, Minister of Education Ecaterina Andronescu, a USHMM official, and Director of the Wiesel Institute Alexandru Florian signed a joint protocol of cooperation laying the groundwork for introducing historically accurate lessons on the history of the Holocaust and the Jewish people in Romania into the public school curriculum. 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 to implement cooperation agreements with the USHMM and provided the museum copies of historical records.

In June former prime minister Dancila, in coordination with the World Jewish Congress, hosted an international meeting of special envoys and coordinators combating anti-Semitism in Bucharest. The main conference took place in the Parliamentary Palace and featured representatives from more than 25 countries and international organizations. The government released a statement after the conference describing its main themes as providing for the safety and security of Jewish communities; applying the working definition of anti-Semitism endorsed by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA); financing Holocaust research, education, and remembrance; and recording and collecting hate crime data.

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

Historians and Holocaust experts said the general history curricula provided few mandatory classes on the country's Holocaust history. A high school course, "History of the Jews – The Holocaust," remained optional.

In April Andrei Caramitru, a prominent member of the Save Romania Union party, posted a message on his Facebook page stating that the Social Democrat Party was responsible for "a Holocaust against Romania" that was more serious than what happened in the country during WWII. Caramitru subsequently apologized for his Facebook post.

On July 5, then prime minister Dancila established an interministerial committee tasked with drafting a national strategy on combating anti-Semitism, xenophobia, radicalization, and hate speech. The committee was coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and included representatives of the Justice, Interior, Education and Culture Ministries, as well as the Wiesel Institute. The committee did not take any action by year's end.

Pursuant to its pledge to implement the recommendations of the Wiesel Commission report, the government commemorated the annual National Holocaust Remembrance Day on October 9, marking the day when Romanian authorities began deporting the country's Jews to Transnistria.

On October 8, President Iohannis hosted a public ceremony to sign into law a bill establishing the National Jewish History and Holocaust Museum. The law transferred a state-owned building in downtown Bucharest, intended to host the museum, to the Wiesel Institute, the governmental agency in charge of developing the museum. During the ceremony, President Iohannis underscored the contribution of Jews to the development of modern Romania. On the same day, then prime minister Dancila released a statement paying tribute to the victims of the Holocaust. The Wiesel Institute held a wreath-laying ceremony at the Holocaust Memorial in Bucharest on October 10; former minister of foreign affairs Ramona Manescu delivered remarks. The ceremony was not held on October 9 to avoid conflicting with Yom Kippur. On May 2, former prime minister Dancila commemorated Yom HaShoah (Holocaust Remembrance Day) by taking part in the March of the Living at Auschwitz. On January 27, President Iohannis and then prime minister Dancila posted on social media messages honoring Holocaust victims and survivors.

The country is a member of the IHRA.

On November 18, Turkish diplomats interrupted a religious event organized by the local Muslim community, disrupting an invited speaker and blocking her from delivering prepared remarks. Muslim community leaders said government officials present at the event did nothing to defend their right to hold events as the community saw appropriate, but they took no action following the incident. According to members of the Muslim community and other observers, the government's inadequate financial support, primarily in the form of salaries for imams, made the Muslim community vulnerable to radicalization and outside influence from countries such as Turkey, Russia, and Saudi Arabia.

### **Section III. Status of Societal Respect for Religious Freedom**

According to Jehovah's Witnesses, in several areas of the country some members continued to encounter opposition to their activities from ROC priests. They recorded 14 incidents of threats, verbal abuse, and public incitement against them by ROC priests in Bucharest and the counties of Bacau, Buzau, Braila, Caras-Severin, Dolj, Ialomita, Olt, Vaslui, and Valcea. In one instance, a victim and the Jehovah's Witnesses denomination filed a criminal complaint that they had been hindered in the exercise of religious freedom. As of June, an investigation was pending before the Prosecutor's Office in Bacau.

According to non-Orthodox religious groups, ROC priests continued to prevent them from burying their dead in ROC or public cemeteries, or otherwise continued to restrict such burials by requiring they take place in isolated sections of a cemetery or follow Orthodox rituals. Representatives of the Christian Evangelical Church said such cases continued against them as well, although local sources did not always provide details because they stated they feared ROC reprisals. The Seventh-day Adventist Church reported that several ROC priests did not allow their members access to cemeteries to perform funeral rites.

The Christian Evangelical Church reported in May that the local Roman Catholic priest in the village of Eremitu, Mures County, did not allow the burial of a deceased evangelical Christian in the only village cemetery, which was owned by the Roman Catholic Church. The individual was buried in another town.

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.

On February 26, the National Anti-Discrimination Council released the results of a survey showing a majority of Romanians express high levels of distrust towards Muslims (68 percent), Jews (46 percent), and other religious minorities (58 percent). According to the survey, 23 percent of respondents would refuse to be friends with members of a religious minority, while more than 60 percent stated they believed Muslims are dangerous.

In January the EC published a Special Eurobarometer survey of perceptions of anti-Semitism based on interviews it conducted in December 2018 in each European Union (EU) member state. According to the survey, 23 percent of residents believed anti-Semitism was a problem in Romania, and 6 percent believed it had increased over the previous five years. The percentage who believed that anti-Semitism was a problem in nine different categories was as follows: Holocaust denial, 39 percent; on the internet, 42 percent; anti-Semitic graffiti or vandalism, 40 percent; expression of hostility or threats against Jews in public places, 42 percent; desecration of Jewish cemeteries, 44 percent; physical attacks against Jews, 43 percent; anti-Semitism in schools and universities, 40 percent; anti-Semitism in political life, 40 percent; and anti-Semitism in media, 39 percent.

In May the EC carried out a study in each EU-member state on perceptions of discrimination and published the results in September. According to the findings, 43 percent of respondents believed discrimination on the basis of religion or belief was widespread in Romania, while 51 percent said it was rare; 77 percent would be comfortable with having a person of a different religion than the majority of the population occupy the highest elected political position in the country. In addition, 86 percent said they would be comfortable working closely with a Christian, and 74 percent said they would be with an atheist, 70 percent with a Jew, 72 percent with a Buddhist, and 69 percent with a Muslim. Asked how they would feel if their child were in a “love relationship” with an individual belonging to various groups, 85 percent said they would be comfortable if the partner were Christian, 62 percent if atheist, 59 percent if Jewish, 57 percent if Buddhist, and 51 percent if Muslim.

Private media outlets continued to depict Muslim refugees as a threat because of their religion. An article published by the online newspaper evz.ro in March stated that Muslim migrants posed a lethal threat to European civilization and that the only alternatives for Europeans were civil war or obedience to Islam. Conspiracy theories and antagonistic speech against Muslims continued to appear frequently in social media.

Material promoting anti-Semitic views and glorifying Legionnaires, as well as messages promoting Holocaust denial and relativism, appeared on the internet. In March the website ortodoxinfo.ro published an article stating that through the “Purim” holiday, Jews took delight in celebrating the massacre of thousands of children.

Observers reported that many investigations of anti-Semitic acts were closed after law enforcement officers established suspects were either minors or insane and, as a consequence, were not responsible for their actions. In April authorities closed a 2018 case against an individual accused of painting anti-Semitic and other offensive messages on the childhood home of Elie Wiesel, in Sighetu Marmatiei. A psychiatric expert found the suspect unable to take responsibility for his actions.

On April 3, media reported vandalism of a Jewish cemetery in the town of Husi, where individuals destroyed dozens of headstones. President of the Jewish Communities Vainer stated that the vandalism was the culmination of a series of anti-Semitic incidents that occurred in Husi. Law enforcement officers identified three suspects; as of October, the investigation was pending at the Prosecutor's Office attached to the Vaslui Tribunal, and no one was arrested by year's end. As of October, a case involving the destruction in 2017 of 10 tombstones in a Jewish cemetery in Bucharest remained pending before the Prosecutor's Office. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a suspect was identified and investigated for the crime of desecration of graves, but there were no developments in the case by year's end. Jewish organizations did not publicly comment on the investigation.

As of December, an investigation regarding anti-Semitic and Holocaust denial messages painted on the external wall of a synagogue in Cluj-Napoca in 2017 remained pending. In December 2018, the Prosecutor's Office had decided that the perpetrators could not be identified. According to the MFA, the investigation would resume once new evidence was uncovered.

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

In May the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom met with government officials including the State Secretary for Religious Denominations Victor Opaschi, then foreign minister Teodor Melescanu, then vice prime minister Ana Birchall, and members of parliament and discussed anti-Semitism, Holocaust

remembrance issues, and the general position of the Orthodox church in the country

With the general secretary of the government, embassy officials continued to raise concerns about the slow pace of religious property restitution involving members of the Jewish community and express support for the proposals of the WJRO's working group to help speed the processes of property restitution and pensions for Holocaust survivors. Embassy officials also discussed these issues with other government ministers and political leaders.

In meetings with President Iohannis, Prime Minister Orban, and other government officials, embassy officials expressed their support for the establishment of a National Jewish History and Holocaust Museum.

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. government officials also continued to support the Wiesel Institute in establishing a National Jewish History and Holocaust Museum 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.

During his visit, the Ambassador at Large met with Muslim, Protestant, and Catholic religious leaders, as well as with ROC Patriarch Daniel, ROC Metropolitan Nifon, and Chief Rabbi of Romania Rafael Shaffer. The Ambassador at Large stressed the importance of religious freedom and began discussions for future cooperation, including establishing a religious freedom envoy in the country.

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 and Sighet. In June the Ambassador addressed the Romanian-government-sponsored Holocaust remembrance conference to stress the importance of education in countering hatred against Jews. In October at a ceremony for National Holocaust Commemoration Day held in Bucharest, the Ambassador spoke against anti-Semitic attitudes, rhetoric, and incidents in the

country and laid a wreath. A senior embassy official spoke at a Holocaust commemoration event in Iasi.

Using social media, the embassy emphasized respect for religious freedom and condemned anti-Semitic incidents. In April for example, the embassy produced and posted on Facebook a video condemning anti-Semitic incidents, including the vandalism of Jewish graves in a cemetery in Husi. The embassy also helped organize and sponsored the Elie Wiesel Study Tour in July, which provided students the opportunity to see firsthand the horrors of Auschwitz and to understand the political, social, and cultural forces that created the Holocaust.