

**Country Visit: Romania**  
**Report of the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chair-in-Office on**  
**Combating Anti-Semitism, Rabbi Andrew Baker, October 6-8, 2009**

***Background:***

Prior to the Holocaust there were 759,000 Jews in Romania. Fascist and anti-Semitic messages found ready audiences during the interwar period and official anti-Jewish measures were instituted as early as 1937-1938. Two pogroms carried out by the Iron Guard in 1940-1941 resulted in the deaths of 140 Jews. Three general massacres soon followed, which resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Jews, with 10,000-12,000 murdered in one extended act of carnage in Iasi in July 1941. Marshal Ion Antonescu brought order to the state and a formal alliance with Nazi Germany. However, he went on to order the deportations of Romanian Jews in October 1941. It is estimated that between 280,000 and 380,000 Jews died in these forced transports from Bessarabia to Transnistria or were murdered or succumbed to disease in this occupied area of Ukraine. At the end of the war and with the advent of Communist rule many of those Romanian Jews who survived the Holocaust emigrated to Israel or America.

In 1967, Romania was the only Warsaw Pact nation that did not sever relations with the State of Israel. The Jewish community, which at this time still numbered almost 100,000 was allowed to maintain its communal institutions, albeit under the watchful eye of the state. From 1948 until his death over four decades later, the community was led by Chief Rabbi Moses Rosen, whose charismatic presence helped nurture Jewish life inside the country and assist young Jews in making *aliyah* to Israel. This was done with the tacit approval of Communist authorities, and in return Rabbi Rosen was expected to lend his support to Romania's efforts to secure Western trade and credits. Only with the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, did it emerge that the Ceausescu Government extracted ransom payments for each Jew allowed to emigrate. Largely because of this continuous emigration, the present day Jewish population of Romania is less than 10,000.

Romania was among those Eastern European countries which had difficulty confronting its Holocaust-era past. Official history had acknowledged the deportation to Nazi death camps of Romanian Jews in territory controlled by Hungary, but until recently it had been silent about the deaths and deportations carried out by Romanian authorities under the orders of Marshal Antonescu. Six years ago the President of Romania established an international historical commission, chaired by Elie Wiesel, which issued its findings and recommendations two years later. Among those recommendations was the construction of a Holocaust memorial in central Bucharest. The dedication of this memorial coincided with the dates of our visit. Speaking to the assembled guests,

Romanian President Traian Basescu described his own tearful experience when he first viewed photos of Romanian police forcing Jewish victims into Romanian rail cars and recognized the truth of this history. Despite the historical commission report and his own strong words, he confided that many Romanians still viewed the Antonescu regime with sympathy.

***Meeting with Jewish Community Leadership:***

In the 1990s the Jewish Community was especially troubled by various efforts to rehabilitate the reputation of Marshall Antonescu. Today they describe generally successful efforts—albeit with outside pressure—to remove public statues, street names and other official recognition given to him.

In the main, they have not confronted violent attacks against Jews as in some countries, and they believe there is adequate legislation in Romania to address the problem of anti-Semitism and hate speech more generally. Nevertheless, they explained that anti-Semitic books and materials can be found for sale in book stores, on the streets and at book fairs. They fault Government prosecutors for not employing the tools they have to control this. The Chairman of the Romanian Federation of Jewish Communities (Fedrom) offered his own case as an example. Nearly two years ago he filed suit against the newspaper of the right-wing Greater Romania Party for an anti-Semitic attack against him personally, but there has still been no work from the Prosecutor as to how or whether the case will be carried forward.

The Jewish Community voiced special concern for the protection of its cemeteries. There have been some serious acts of vandalism, including 121 gravestones destroyed in the Bucharest Cemetery during the past year. Fedrom is responsible for over 800 cemeteries, and most are in towns or cities with no Jewish population today. Nevertheless, because they have legal title authorities sometimes insist that they bear sole responsibility for protecting them.

Right-wing, populist parties which espouse xenophobic, racist and anti-Semitic themes have been an active element in the post-Communist political arena, although none achieved enough votes in the last elections to enter Parliament. However, community leaders cautioned against drawing positive conclusions, explaining that two extremist parties split the vote of what they say is 8-10 percent “aggressive nationalists” among the voting public. And one of these parties subsequently won a place in the European Parliament.

***Mr. Cătălin Predoiu, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Justice:***<sup>1</sup>

With reference to the Holocaust commemoration ceremonies scheduled for the following day, Minister Predoiu stated that Romania is ready to acknowledge what happened to Jews in this country in the past. He emphasized how important it is for people to know the facts of the Holocaust and the need for it to receive special attention by school students. He expressed the hope that in this way Romania might serve as an example to other countries.

He is mindful of the Jewish Community's concern about protecting cemeteries and spoke of the efforts to investigate the recent desecrations and the implementation of police patrols around them.

With regard to hate speech laws, the Minister acknowledged that there was a "lack of clarity" about them and thus some difficulties in applying them. Conflicting freedom of speech guarantees, sometimes unsigned articles and an inefficient judiciary were identified as contributing to the problem. The discussion also turned to the role political leaders could play by publicly speaking out when such anti-Semitic, hate speech arises in public discourse. The Minister agreed that this too was important, and he made a special point of stressing this in the official release about our meeting issued by the Ministry later that day.

The meeting also served as an occasion to present various ODIHR tools, including the LEOP (police training program) and teaching materials designed to combat anti-Semitism.

***Minister of Culture, Theodor Paleologu:***

The Holocaust Memorial about to be dedicated in Bucharest was a project carried out by the Cultural Ministry, which organized the original design competition and, in coordination with the international historical commission, described the narrative of the Holocaust in Romania that the memorial should convey. The Minister was scheduled to present the memorial to official guests at the dedication. Now that this memorial has been established, he suggested the creation of Jewish Museum in Bucharest that might tell the story of Jewish life and culture in Romania—a particular need, he felt, in light of the declining Jewish population. Romania is also home to dozens of synagogue buildings, many of which are abandoned and unused in communities with no longer any Jews, and the Minister contemplated ways in which they might be restored with government assistance and used as cultural centers.

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<sup>1</sup> Due to a governmental crisis, the Social Democratic Party had pulled out of the ruling coalition on 1 October 2009. In the time of the country visit, most remaining ministers held two portfolios until a new government would be formed.

***Ministry of Interior, State Secretary Marian Tiulescu:***

The State Secretary described his own background as a former Police Chief of Bucharest and Deputy Director of the National Police. He expressed his view that with regard to matters of anti-Semitism or other group hatreds, the level of violence and aggressiveness in Romania is lower than in other countries. However, he acknowledged that right wing extremist organizations are active in the country, and he is concerned about them.

He suggested that one should recognize that anti-Semitism is manifest in several ways and described them in increasing degrees of seriousness. First, there is anti-Semitic graffiti, which can be quite frequent. However, perpetrators of this are often teenagers who are not motivated by anti-Semitism beliefs but are rather attracted to doing something that is “forbidden.” More problematic are the Internet websites of extremist organizations. However, in this area there is close cooperation with the intelligence service and success in tracking down these groups.

The destruction or vandalizing of cemeteries and synagogues should be taken seriously, even if the troubled youths found responsible for one major cemetery desecration in Bucharest last year, hailing from a nearby school, were not motivated by extremist ideology. The State Secretary said they recognize that such incidents are covered by the media and inflict genuine pain to members of the Jewish community in Romania and abroad. In such situations the tools available to law enforcement are limited. They try to work with school authorities, and parents can be fined for the damages caused by their children. Proposed amendments to the law will allow courts more leeway in responding, including the ability to sentence minors to do community service, which may be useful in some situations.

Discussion also focused on ODIHR’s police training assistance. While the State Secretary expressed confidence that Romanian authorities are generally successful in dealing with hate crimes, he did allow that problems could always increase. He expressed an interest in developing a formal relationship with ODIHR and LEOP that could lead to further police training in Romania.

***Recommendations:***

With the dedication of the Holocaust Memorial there is now a powerful and moving place in Bucharest that will attract many visitors—among them survivors, dignitaries, the relatives and descendants of victims, and certainly school children. The Romanian Government should consider ways in which the memorial can become an integrated part of educational efforts to teach about the Holocaust.

Considering its prominence the Government should take care that the memorial is protected from vandalism. And it should do more to insure that cemeteries and synagogue buildings are also protected.

ODIHR and the Interior Ministry should follow up formally with each other so that an agreement can be reached to bring the police training program for dealing with hate crimes (LEOP) to Bucharest.

Romanian Education Ministry officials should consider cooperating with ODIHR on the development of materials to combat anti-Semitism for use by students and teachers.

Romania should review its existing hate speech laws and accompanying procedures with the goal of making them more effective in punishing and deterring the publication of anti-Semitic and other racist and xenophobic material.

The importance of public figures speaking out against anti-Semitism was eloquently stated by Minister Predoiu himself:

*“Speaking against xenophobic and anti-Semitic attitudes is a genuine moral obligation in a democratic society, which devolves equally upon political and opinion leaders from the ranks of the civil society. Language used in public and political statements against discrimination and intolerance are the exact instrument needed to put in place an environment that does not allow for a group or category of persons to be excluded. Public persons must set an example in that direction and immediately speak against any breach of a democratic society’s moral law.”*

Romanian political leaders should set the example in finding opportunities to speak out against anti-Semitism and intolerance.

***Program:***

*Accompanied by Mr. Norbert Hinterleitner, Advisor on Anti-Semitism Issues in ODIHR’s Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department*

6 October 2009

Roundtable discussion with Senator Aurel Vainer, Chairman of the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania, Chief Rabbi Menachem Hacohen, and other members of the community board

7 October 2009

Mr. Cătălin Predoiu, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of Justice

Theodor Paleologu, Minister of Culture and Alexander Bălăşescu, Director of the Ministry's Cabinet

Mr. Marian Titulescu, Secretary of State, Ministry of Interior

8 October 2009

Dedication of Holocaust Memorial, including a speech delivered by President Traian Basescu, remarks from Jewish and Roma survivors, and a message from Elie Wiesel

Special Parliamentary Session to Commemorate the Holocaust in Romania

Ceremonies and Reception in the President Palace to honor members of the international historical commission and Jewish and Roma community leaders