

Religious persecution in Romania - letter to European officials

13 March 2006

We are writing regarding a very serious case that affects the lives of thousands of Romanian citizens. Students and teachers of the MISA yoga school are the victims of systematic discrimination and persecution for nothing else but their spiritual beliefs. They have been fired from their jobs, their families broken, held without charge and without legal defence, interrogated, beaten in their homes, kept under surveillance, slandered, harassed by the police with trumped up charges which are later dropped, and their official complaints and appeals for justice are promptly dismissed or ignored. There is no evidence of any just cause for these actions, and Romania has a history since Communist times of religious intolerance, so the EU must be aware of the serious implications of the MISA case before accession of Romania in 2007.

The abuses of the Romanian authorities' against MISA reached a pinnacle in March 2004, when Prosecutors and Gendarmes violently entered 16 communal residences of yoga practitioners with questionable warrants, and beat and threatened the occupants at gunpoint. Private property, including money, jewellery and clothing, as well as materials of the yoga course were confiscated without registration and were not returned or compensated to this day; further the police showed a severe lack of respect for the traditional sacred items, objects and books of the yoga practitioners during the raids. During interrogations, the prosecutors told the yoga practitioners that the harassment would stop if they gave up their yoga practice.

It is incredible that a country applying to enter the EU is still producing political refugees to the EU. In October 2005 the Swedish Supreme Court denied Romania's extradition request because "due to his religious conception Gregorian Bivolaru runs the risk of being exposed to pursuit of evil character after an extradition" (quoted from the decision of the Swedish Supreme Court, 21 October, 2005). In December 2005, Sweden granted political asylum to Gregorian Bivolaru, the founder of MISA, after denying the Romanian extradition request for accusations based on statements that were taken by coercing the witness. The Swedish Supreme Court granted asylum because the evidence showed that Mr. Bivolaru could not have a fair trial in Romania because of his spiritual beliefs.

Subsequently, the Minister of Justice of Romania asked the Superior Council of Magistracy (SCM) to investigate the MISA case as it now casts a shadow on the entire Romanian Justice system. The SCM report came to an incredible conclusion: that the members of MISA made the violence and aggressions upon themselves!

The abuses and injustice continue to this day. Forty head teachers and administrators of MISA face legal harassment which does not allow them to live normal lives, and 70 residences of yoga students have been levied following a ridiculous lawsuit against MISA.

All the official channels to deal with this case in Romania have been exhausted, so the only hope for justice is attention and pressure from the EU. It is critical that this case is solved and that religious persecution in Romania stops before Romania joins the EU in 2007.

Thank you for your attention to this case,

ATMAN FEDERATION