



United States Department of State

JUL 10 2013

Washington, D.C. 20520

JUL - 9 2013

Dear Mr. Harris:

Thank you for your letter of June 13 regarding property restitution, which is an Administration priority that we have long raised with Romania and other European partners. The Administration has played a leading role in encouraging Romania to enact legislation that provides fair, transparent, and swift recourse for those who are the rightful owners of property confiscated or nationalized by Romania's past fascist and communist regimes. Most recently, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues Ambassador Douglas Davidson travelled in late May to Bucharest to engage on this issue with Romania's government, parliament, and civil society.

The Romanian government is attempting to correct shortcomings in its overall restitution mechanism. In response to a 2010 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights, the Romanian Parliament recently passed new legislation modifying its mechanism governing the restitution of property seized by the former fascist and communist regimes. This legislation focuses primarily on individual claims. At the same time, senior Romanian officials have said that resolving the remaining issue of communal property restitution for ethnic and religious minorities is the next step in improving the overall restitution process.

As the parliament and government develop new legislation, we have advocated that the current and any future legal framework should resolve fairly and expeditiously the long-standing claims of religious and ethnic minorities, including Holocaust survivors and their heirs. Romanian officials have assured us they are open to our suggestions and those of various stakeholders for amending and improving restitution legislation. We believe Romania can achieve this in the current legislative environment. The Department of State will continue to monitor the situation as Romania's implementing regulations are made public, and we will advocate for improvements as necessary.

U.S. Embassy representatives are also in regular contact with the leaders and communities representing Romania's religious minorities. In the case of the Greek Catholic Church, existing Romanian law stipulates that it and the Romanian

The Honorable

Andy Harris,

House of Representatives.

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Orthodox Church should negotiate directly to reach an overall resolution to the problem, including reconciliation and restitution of property. Embassy officials have encouraged both Churches to resume their official dialogue, which has been suspended for a decade.

With regard to the Szekely Miko Reformed High School case, the U.S. Embassy has been engaged in the matter from the outset. Our Embassy has worked for many years with Attila Markó, one of the defendants. Mr. Markó is a prominent member of the ethnic Hungarian community in Romania, and a respected defender of human rights who has held several important positions in the Romanian government. Embassy representatives met with Mr. Markó on June 25, and at his request they attended the June 27 hearing of the Supreme Court as official observers. At this hearing, the Court deferred final judgment on the case and scheduled the next hearing for October 10. We will continue to advocate for a sound judicial decision based on the rule of law.

Advocating for the rights of Romania's religious and ethnic minorities, including the rights of the Jewish, Hungarian, Greek Catholic and Roma communities, is a key priority of the U.S. Embassy in Bucharest. Our former Ambassador and his predecessors, our current Chargé d'affaires, and other senior Embassy officials engage regularly on these issues with senior government officials, including the Prime Minister, the President and the leaders of both Houses of Parliament. We often amplify these efforts by joining forces with like-minded embassies from Europe, Israel, and elsewhere.

We hope this information was helpful to you. Please do not hesitate to contact us again if we can be of further assistance on this or any other matter.

Sincerely,



Thomas B. Gibbons
Acting Assistant Secretary
Legislative Affairs