

**HUMAN RIGHTS DEVELOPMENTS IN ROMANIA
THE ACTIVITIES OF THE ROMANIAN HELSINKI COMMITTEE
(APADOR-CH)
EXCERPTS FROM 1996 REPORT**

VI. MINORITIES IN ROMANIA

C. RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

3. The Movement for Spiritual Integration with the Absolute

The actions started against an organisation whose members practise Yoga, "The Movement for Spiritual Integration with the Absolute" (MISA) and against one of its leaders, Gregorian Bivolaru, continued in 1996. This campaign placed all the movements and association with Asian filiation in a delicate position.

a) The press campaign and repression of MISA members

The press campaign launched against MISA and the Yoga instructor Gregorian Bivolaru had began in 1990 and reached a peak in 1995. Romania libera, Jurnalul national, Ziua, Academia Catavencu, etc. continued to publish slanderous articles about MISA in 1996. MISA lodged complaints against several journalists that they accused of libel. The fact that in several cases the journalists were punished (Corneliu Reu from Tinerama and Cristian Negureanu from Romania libera were fined in 1995) gave the impression that the hostility focused against this group is kept under control by state institutions under these circumstances. This was one of the reasons APADOR-CH had not taken any steps regarding MISA's status in the past.

For the first time, in 1996, state authorities intervened in their turn against MISA. On June 17, 1996, around 11:00pm, a group of several dozens police officers stormed into the gym of the Bucharest Polytechnic Institute where approximately 150 persons were taking part in a Yoga session. They asked for the participants' identity papers and started questioning them in a menacing manner. The about 20 persons who did not have any identification on them were taken to the police station. At a certain point, a police officer tried to seize a video camera used by a Yoga student who was filming what was happening in the gym. Two other students, Camelia Rosu and Carmen Efta, tried to interpose between their colleague and the police officer. Two other police officers started hitting them and injured them. Their medical certificates bear witness to these injuries. Camelia Rosu and Carmen Efta lodged complaints with the General Prosecutor's Office but these complaints had not yet been considered at the end of 1996.

b) The position of APADOR-CH

In August 1996, APADOR-CH conducted an investigation in the Costinesti camp where MISA members gather every year. For two days, the APADOR-CH representatives watched the group to see whether the allegations relating to the fact that this association disturbs public peace and order and act against good morals are founded. The MISA gatherings took place under civilized conditions. Nothing in the activity of MISA members ran counter the law, which makes the campaign launched against them unjustified. In their interviews, MISA leaders contested the information disseminated in the media and backed their statements with reliable data. They also confirmed the declarations made by the two students molested by the police interviewed by APADOR-CH.

In 1996, APADOR-CH started investigating the reasons for which various newspapers published articles against MISA but, in order to define its position in connection with this situation so as to be able to put an end to this campaign against freedom of conscience, the association's activities will continue in 1997.

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V. MINORITIES IN ROMANIA

B. RELIGIOUS MINORITIES: FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE

5. The MISA case

The organisation Movement for Spiritual Integration with the Absolute (MISA), a Yoga movement, was the target of libel and defamation in the media ever since it appeared in 1990. In 1996, these attacks were joined by public authorities interventions, which resulted in refusals to rent them rooms and even in assaults against several members. APADOR-CH stood up against the violation of the MISA members' freedom of conscience and made its position known to the public and authorities.

In 1997, the press campaigns against MISA continued; dozens of slanderous materials were published during the first half of the year in most dailies, not to mention television and radio broadcasts on this topic.

The APADOR-CH representative took part in Yoga classes held at Steaua sports club in March and confirmed that the articles which referred to these classes were ungrounded. During the investigation, the APADOR-CH representative encountered situations when, due to the pressures exercised by journalists and authorities, the management of some institutions reconsidered their decisions to allow MISA members to use the space as they previously agreed by contract or agreement.

Thus, on 9 March 1997, at 8 p.m., when the MISA students arrived at the Bucharest Factory for Electric Machines for their Yoga session, the door keeper announced that the session could no longer take place because he had his orders in this sense.

MISA also complained against other actions aimed at intimidating its members — such as the action of the 18th precinct police officers who stormed a MISA headquarters on 10 March 1997, 7 a.m., together with a group trained to fight terrorists. The persons found at the headquarters were handcuffed. In 1997, Gregorian Bivolaru, informal leader of MISA, was summoned every now and again to the police to give declarations on his activity.

In the second half of 1997, MISA was almost completely removed from the media's field of interest. At the same time, none of the complaints filed by MISA members led to any result.