

## **AMERICAN HUNGARIAN FEDERATION OF METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON, DC**

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20134 Wynnfield Drive, Germantown, Maryland 20874, (301) 972-1798

### **PRESIDENT ION ILIESCU MUST BE URGED TO DEMOCRATIZE ROMANIA**

Romania's President Ion Iliescu will visit the United States on October 26 – 29, 2003. This opportunity should be used to urge and encourage Romania to implement and complete overdue democratic reforms.

Romania was invited to join NATO because of its geo-strategic location and participation in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and because of its stated commitment to shared Western values – values that form the bedrock of the Alliance. Romania's record needs improvement, and several of its shortcomings that ought to be addressed with President Iliescu include:

Endemic corruption (*see* Attachment 1, "U.S. Ambassador to Romania Michael Guest issued a statement on 6 September saying that 'corruption is one of the most important problems which blocks Romania's normal evolution.'" *RFE/RL* "Romania: Alleged Misuse of EU Funds Highlights Country's Corruption Problems," Eugen Tomiuc);

lack of independent judiciary (*see* Attachment 2, "We are confronted at home with a gap indeed between what the law says about independence of judiciary and the judges and the daily realities." Testimony before the Helsinki Commission of Renate Weber, Open Society Foundation, October 1, 2003);

fair, expeditious and complete resolution of long-pending property restitution cases, especially to Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, Reformed and Unitarian Churches, the latter three being historic Hungarian churches (*see* Attachment 3, Statements by Congressman Tom Lantos, "Progress has been both slow and disappointingly limited," Congressman Robert T. Matsui, "Restitution of these communal properties has been too slow," and Thomas G. Tancredo, "However, the implementation has been extremely slow, especially when it comes to the return of the properties of Hungarian religious and educational institutions.");

infringement on freedom of the press (*see* Attachment 4, "Especially since the regime now in power and all the state institutions would pay no matter what costs to break or avoid the democratic rules, including the freedom of press and the access to information," *Romania Libera*, "Good bye to Free Europe?" October 24, 2003, and *RFE/RL Newsline*, "Romania Falls in Press-Freedom List," October 22, 2003;

Holocaust denial or revisionism (*see* Attachment 5, "When this phenomenon [Holocaust denial] appears at the highest levels of government, as it has in Romania, it is especially

disturbing.” *Antisemitism Watch*, September 30, 2003, and Press Release, “ADL Calls Romanian President’s Comments on Holocaust ‘Deeply Troubling,’” July 25, 2003); and

failure to respect the minority rights of Romania’s 1.5 million Hungarians. Among measures Romania must take to be in compliance with Western values and international norms include the following:

Return church, educational and other properties to the Hungarian community that had been confiscated by the communist regimes. Romanian authorities have only returned a tiny fraction of the more than 2000 confiscated church properties. An analysis of the delay and obstructionism by Romanian authorities is set forth in Attachment 6, “Property Restitution and Majority-Minority Relations in Romania: A Case Study of the Restitution Struggles of the Reformed High School in Cluj/Kolozsvár,” Andrew Ludanyi (Ohio Northern University) and Gabriella Nadas (Minority Education Coordinator);

restore the independent Hungarian state university in Cluj/Kolozsvár;

permit Csango children to be taught the Csango language and the members of that community to hold their church services in their mother tongue;

implement bilingualism in public administration, as mandated by law, but often ignored in practice;

restore the Freedom Statue of Arad – a monument to 13 Hungarian generals executed by the Habsburgs for their participation in Hungary’s War of Independence in 1848 – 1849. The official Romanian attitude toward the Hungarian community is revealed by the Interior Ministry’s troubling and inexplicable reference to the Freedom Statue as a “fascist type revisionist and irredentist symbol,” (*Adevarul*, 10/21 and *MTI*, 10/24); and

decentralize (and permit local autonomy) and guarantee the right of assembly.

Romania must be expected to promote tolerance and adopt policies that would permit the members of the large Hungarian community to preserve their unique culture. Discrimination is not only inconsistent with Western values, the rule of law and inter-ethnic harmony, it undermines regional security and saps NATO’s vitality. President Iliescu, therefore, must be reminded that the United States considers respect for the rights of religious and ethnic minorities an indispensable element of civil society and democracy.

October 24, 2003