



SZEKELY NEMZETI TANACS
CONSILIUL NATIONAL SECUIESC
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The Hungarian speaking Szekler community of Transylvania possesses a diverse range of characteristics. Szeklers are part of the Hungarian cultural nation but also citizens of the Romanian state. They are a minority within the state but have always represented the majority in their traditional territory. They have their peculiar regional identity — their own flag, own coat of arms, own anthem - which distinguishes them among Hungarians, and turns Szeklerland into a cultural-island within Romania, An island in both linguistic and religious terms, since it is beyond the Carpathians where Western Christianity ends, and Orthodoxy begins.

Regarding the *Draft Recommendations on guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities* this Forum is about to adopt: We welcome that the draft refers to the importance kin-states can play in the solution of minority-related issues. We also welcome that the draft recommends the various cultural and/or political autonomy arrangements as an appropriate means for improving the participation of religious minorities in decision-making. Similarly important is the affirmation of the importance of anti-discrimination legislation on both domestic and international level.

During the communist era, Romanian governments have confiscated the property belonging to the Catholic, the Reformed, and the Unitarian churches on a massive scale. Several thousands of schools, hospitals, libraries, and other institutions were taken away from their owners. Ever since the downfall of the iron curtain Eastern- and Central European states went through a political transition, which included the adoption of domestic legislation to ensure the restitution of the aforementioned acts. Following these resolutions many real-estates has been given back to the churches in the early nineties, but the progress reached a halt after a short while and remains incomplete ever since. We think therefore that it is absolutely vital to ensure, without causeless delay, the full and effective restitution of wrongful acts committed by former totalitarian dictatorships on religious minorities.

Another challenge for western Christian persons of Romania is that the state favors the Orthodox Church as state religion, which receives more public subsidies, than other religious communities of the country. It should be a basic principal of every member state of the UN that subsidizing the various confessions must be implemented in a way that ensures the legal equality among these confessions, as well as the prohibition of all forms of direct or indirect discrimination. These subsidies have to be transparent and subject to proper scrutiny. It should be noted, however, that additional subsidies granted for religious minorities cannot be understood as discrimination.

We consider the restitution process in Romania to be insufficient, and incomplete, and the current system of subsidizing the churches of the country to be discriminative, and non-transparent. We are well aware, that the same grave issues exist in other countries as well, which is why we invite the United Nations to encourage, and stimulate, but also to monitor and thoroughly scrutinize the restitution processes, and the financial subsidies member states provide for religious groups of their respective territories, to ensure that religious minorities receive a

proper remedy for the injustice imposed upon them by former dictatorships, as well as to abolish all existing forms of financial discrimination, and prevent future ones effectively.