

# Bonner Querschnitte

*Bonn Profiles – Press Reports*

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## **BQ 260 – No. 25/2013**

### **Major hearing in the Romanian Parliament regarding freedom of religion and Christian persecution**

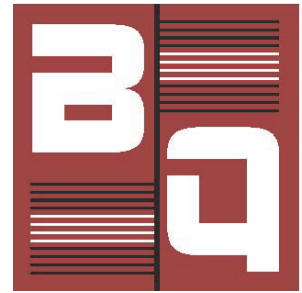
#### **The International Institute for Religious Freedom provides expert input**

(Bonn, 24.06.2013) In a six-hour hearing in the committee for human rights and law of the Romanian Parliament on the theme of religious freedom, the first speakers were Foreign Minister Titus Corlatean and Culture Minister Daniel Barbu, followed by the chairman of the committee for human rights, Nicolae Paun, and the chairs of other committees. The Director of IIRF, Thomas Schirmmacher, summarized the results of international research on freedom of religion. This was followed by comments from other ministers of state, representatives, and international guests.

The Romanian Foreign Minister recommended making freedom of religion a continuing foreign policy theme, following the example of Germany, where he had recently visited German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle and Chancellor Angela Merkel. It would help if every country were engaged in protecting the religious concerns of their own citizens living abroad. In this line, Romania has been repeatedly engaged diplomatically on behalf of the Romanian Orthodox Church and Romanian Baptists living in Serbia. In this manner, freedom of religion has already become a normal foreign policy theme. Romania has long harbored several small Christian minorities as well as followers of other religions, alongside a large national church, who have been exemplary in their participation in both the state and society. He called on other states to see in Christian and other minorities an enriching body of engaged citizens, not a threat to society.



First round of the hearing, from left: Chair of the Human Rights Committee, Professor Bill Prevette (Oxford University); Thomas Schirmmacher; Foreign Minister (on the monitor); Moderator Nelu Burcea; Minister of Culture



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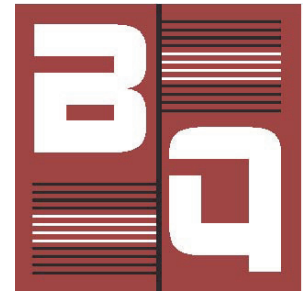
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With the Romanian Culture Minister (left) and the Romanian Foreign Minister (right)

it a valuable treasure to protect both within and without. Schirmmacher emphasized that religious freedom supports a peaceful society, while lands in which religious freedom is suppressed do not produce harmony, but because they are shaped by internal violence, they often provide the breeding grounds for terrorism. (Schirmmacher teaches sociology of religion at a state university in Romania.)

In a concluding discussion, the Foreign Minister, the Culture Minister, and the Director of IIRF agreed to have regular cooperation between the Romanian government and IIRF.

The hearings were moderated by Nela Burcea of the Romanian Asociatia Constiinta Libertate ([www.constiintasilibertate.ro](http://www.constiintasilibertate.ro)), the Romanian branch of the Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) founded by the Seventh Day Adventists.

At the conclusion of the hearing, Nele Burcea, for the International Religious Liberty Association, and Thomas Schirmmacher, for the International Institute for Religious Freedom, presented a 600-page book to the public (Jurnalul Libertatii de Constiinta), in which 45 professors teaching in Romania, from the whole range of academic disciplines, confessions, religions, and worldviews,



Second round of the hearing, from left: Professor Bill Pevette (Oxford University), Thomas Schirmmacher (on the monitor), Minister of Education, Moderator Nelu Burcea, Stenographer

In his speech Schirmmacher described the way the Romanian Revolution of 1989, which led to toppling the communist dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, started in Timisoara when the government deposed the pastor of a Reformed church. More and more churches and other groups of people joined the protest of one congregation. This means that religious freedom belongs to the founding experience of the new era of freedom in Romania, making

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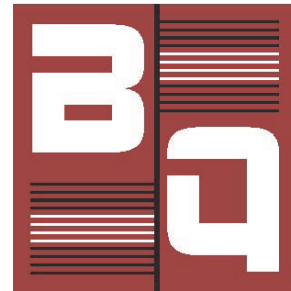
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argue for freedom of religion and conscience. The publishing, as well as a special printing of 800 copies for all the ministers of state and members of parliament, was supported by the Romanian Parliament.

On the evening prior to the hearings there was a special concert of the Romanian National Choir Madrigal in the Athenaeum in central Bucharest, organized by the Culture Minister to support religious freedom.



Thomas Schirmmacher in the Athenaeum bringing greetings at the opening of the concert, and Madrigal, the Romanian National Choir

*As a supplement to this report, we provide a translation of a report that appeared in the German Christian online news service "Pro."*

<http://www.pro-medienmagazin.de/politik.html?&news%5Baction%5D=detail&news%5Bid%5D=6755>

## Romania wants to protect Christians

During the time of communism believers in Romania were especially oppressed. But now this once "East block" state is paying special attention to the persecution of Christians.

Nicolae Ceausescu was regarded as the most brutal dictator of Europe. He ruled Romania until 1989. As almost everywhere in Eastern Europe, churches suffered under the communist regime. Christians were arrested, peaceful protests were beaten down by police officers, and church buildings were taken by the state. Although many believers fled at that time, Romania is now regarded as the most religious of the former East block countries. Ninety-six percent of the population is counted as Christian, including 87% Orthodox. Religious freedom is now anchored in the constitution. Perhaps as part of coming to grips with their past, now, more than 20 years after their revolution, Romania is making freedom of religion a theme in its foreign policy.

Experts, including Thomas Schirmmacher, Director of the International Institute for Religious Freedom of the World Evangelical Alliance, spoke to the Law and Human Rights Committees of Parliament. At the inquiry of pro, the Romanian Foreign Minister, Titus Corlatean, supported making freedom of religion a long-term theme in foreign policy. As an example, he mentioned Germany, which he had visited just a few days previously. He called on states not to see Christian and other religious minorities as a threat but as an enrichment.

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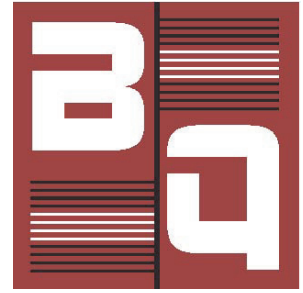
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In connection with the hearings, the International Religious Liberty Association and the Institute for Religious Freedom published a 600-page book in which 45 professors from Romania, including Christians from the Evangelical Alliance, Baptists, and Adventists speak out for freedom of religion and conscience. With support from the Romanian Parliament, the book was distributed to all members of parliament and ministers of state.

Schirmmacher is hoping to further political impulses. He hopes to return soon for discussions in the Romanian foreign ministry, and he said the Ministry of Education could soon establish a commission to anchor freedom of religion in school textbooks. He is convinced that if a country makes religious freedom and protection for persecuted Christians an issue in its foreign policy, it will also have an effect at home. This is especially interesting because of the recent discussions of making the Orthodox faith the state religion in Romania, a step which could unite the religious minorities. (al/pro)

### Links related to the hearing:

- Briefing of the president of parliament in Romanian: [www.cdep.ro/bp/docs/F1064535560/357.pdf](http://www.cdep.ro/bp/docs/F1064535560/357.pdf)
- Announcement in Romanian: <http://www.ziare.com/cultura/academie/libertatea-religioasa-dezbatuta-la-palatul-parlamentului-basescu-invitat-1241025>
- Report in Romanian: <http://www.radiometafora.ro/2013/06/16/politichiadimboviteana-369/>
- Report in Romania: <http://www.libertatea.ro/detalii/articol/homosexuali-parlament-paun-barbu-451829.html>
- Report on the concert: <http://www.adventist.ro/index/prima-pagina/8118-corul-madrigal-a-sustinut-la-ateneul-roman-concertul-libertatii-religioase-2.html>

### Downloads:

- Briefing of the president of parliament ([pdf](#))
- Book cover of Jurnalul Libertatii de Constiinta ([jpg](#))
- [Photo 1](#): Opening speakers at the concert Sunday evening: Bogdan Ciuca, Chair of the Law Committee of the Romanian Parliament, and Thomas Schirmmacher
- [Photo 2](#): Thomas Schirmmacher in the Athenaeum bringing greetings at the opening of the concert, and Madrigal, the Romanian National Choir
- [Photo 3](#): The Romanian Parliament
- [Photo 4](#): With the Romanian Culture Minister (left) and the Romanian Foreign Minister (right)

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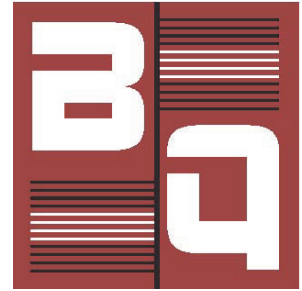
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- [Photo 5](#): First round of the hearing, from left: Chair of the Human Rights Committee, Professor Bill Prevette (Oxford University); Thomas Schirmacher; Foreign Minister (on the monitor); Moderator Nelu Burcea; Minister of Culture
- [Photo 6](#): Second round of the hearing, from left: Professor Bill Prevette (Oxford University), Thomas Schirmacher (on the monitor), Minister of Education, Moderator Nelu Burcea, Stenographer

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