

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1418/09
by Renate Sommer (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Restitution of property to the Greek Catholic Church in Romania

It has been reported that since approximately 1989 the Greek Catholic Church in Romania has been endeavouring to reclaim its property rights to a number of properties used for liturgical and secular purposes which had been expropriated in the previous decades under the country's Communist leadership. The beneficiary of these expropriations was the Romanian Orthodox Church (alongside the Romanian State), in whose possession the disputed property for the most part remains today. The legal bases allowing religious communities to claim the restitution of buildings used for the liturgical purposes and to enforce such claims in a court of law have existed only since August 2004. Before that rules existed only for property used for secular purposes, and these could not be enforced in Romanian courts. Decisions were taken by a joint committee consisting of members of the Orthodox and Greek Catholic Churches, but it failed to achieve satisfactory results. In its progress reports on Romanian accession from 2003 and 2004, the Commission noted that only a small proportion of the properties affected (particularly liturgical buildings) had in fact been restituted and that the process had only just begun (COM(2004)657, p. 28ff and COM(2003)676, p. 30).

The Greek Catholic Church now reports that political moves are under way in Romania (Bill 368/2007) to put an end to the process of restitution and to repeal the relevant laws from 2004. Property is once again to be divided according to the number of members of each religious community (the so-called principle of proportionality). This would benefit the Romanian Orthodox Church owing to the state repression of other religions over many decades and in effect put an end to the restitution of property. It would then be impossible for other religious communities to practise their faith.

Can the Commission state whether, against the background of these events, it considers that freedom of religion in Romania is protected according to the *acquis* of the European Union? Does the Commission intend to put pressure on Romania in this matter if necessary, in order to ensure that regular property ownership relationships can be restored between the religious communities?