

UNCLASSIFIED

HUMAN RIGHTS IN ROMANIA

ISSUE

One year after the fall of the dictator Nicolae Ceausescu, the human rights situation in Romania remains a subject of concern, both inside and outside the country, and contributes to Romania's poor image abroad. Nevertheless, significant progress has been made.

BACKGROUND

As soon as the Ceausescu regime was overthrown in December 1989, the provisional government formed by the Front for National Salvation pledged to the international community to respect the commitments that Romania had made and to ensure that its legislation complied with the requirements of the United Nations and of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe.

Most forms of human rights violations were abolished from the first days of the revolution. The death penalty, the rural systematization program, the demographic control policies, the restrictions on freedom of religious expression and on contacts with foreigners and censorship of the communications media were quickly done away with.

The present government, elected last May, has admitted that the legal system guaranteeing basic individual rights is not fully developed. It would appear, for example, that the rights of persons under detention should be better defined. Some observers have also noted that the legal system still seems to be influenced by the undemocratic practices of the former Communist era. The government is committed, however, to ensuring the right of persons arrested to be informed of the charges laid against them within 24 hours, the right to the services of a lawyer throughout the judicial process and the right to be released on bail. A centre for the promotion of human rights has also been created in Bucharest, and the government's announcement of an ombudsman position augurs well. The right of association is respected, as attested by the many workers' unions.

The legislative and presidential elections held on May 20 were conducted fairly. There are now more than 100 registered political parties, the most recent of which is the Socialist Workers' Party, which is simply a new Communist party.

Some uneasiness persists regarding freedom of the press, despite the phenomenal number of publications now available. Attempts to pass a law on the media ran into sharp criticism from journalists of every political stripe. The problem consists in particular in the media's lack of financial and material resources. Nevertheless, the content of the information media reflects the various political currents.