

„Neoprotestant Denominations and Human Rights in Romania”.
A 1977 Memorandum
(Abstract)

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The 1970's marked in Europe and North America the reaffirming of human rights. The *Final Act of the Helsinki Conference* (August 1, 1975) played an essential role in that respect. Even though Nicolae Ceaușescu, Romania's President at that time, signed this document, Romanians faced during the following period an increasing number of human rights abuses. The most flagrant abuses were probably those related to religious freedom. The so-called Neoprotestant denominations, in particular, were subjected by mid '70^s to a treatment of increased oppression and discrimination. This fact led to some reactions initiated mainly by pastors and preachers, some of whom displayed great acts of courage, energy and vision. Several memoranda were elaborated 'in protest' in Romania between 1973-1974. Some results were achieved at that time. After 1975, however, given the increased ideological control and the emphasis on the nationalist communist vision, members of the Neoprotestant denominations, particularly the Baptist, Brethren, Pentecostal as well as the Seventh-Day Adventist denominations, were subjected to a systematic limitation of religious manifestation. Furthermore, additional measures were taken to marginalize and stigmatize the Romanian Neoprotestants. Adults were reduced to lower ranks or dismissed from their workplace; children and young people were discriminated in schools and obstructed from attending high schools and universities.

In 1977, to protest this assault on religious freedom, a memorandum titled '*The Neoprotestant Denominations and the Human Rights in Romania*' was published. The report was structured in three sections chapter I, *Decree no. 153/1970 and the human rights*; chapter II, *The pressure exercised on the Neoprotestants at work, demoting and dismissing*; and finally, chapter III, *Discrimination in schools*. This document gathered tens of persecution cases against believers from all of Romania, from all of the mentioned denominations, and from various social strata. Although it received large support among many lay people and pastors who were influential within their communities, in the end only six persons signed it: Iosif Țon, Silvian Cioată, Pavel Nicolescu, Aurelian Popescu, Constantin Caraman, Radu Dumitrescu. On August 3, 1977, the document was broadcasted on Radio Free Europe and lead to the immediate

arrest, interrogation and mistreatment of those who signed it. These individuals were released after six weeks of arrest and then closely supervised by the secret police (the *Securitate*). Death-threats were also made against them. Finally they emigrated, except two of them.

The document *Culte neoprotestante și drepturile omului în România* [*Neoprottestant Denominations and Human Rights in Romania*] is published in the Annex, after a copy identical to the original. Notes were added to contextualize some of the statements contained in the document and, where possible, to provide biographic information for many of the individuals named therein.