

## The Orthodox Church in Romania: Is This Their Real Face? FRAUD & TERRORISM

### Executive Summary

In **January 2005**, the **church school** conflict began when the sports-ground locks were smashed by Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox Parish of Oradea (Nagyvárad). This series of **ethnic and religious incidents** were targeted against the Lorántffy Zsuzsanna Reformed High School, which is adjacent to the sports-ground and operated by the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania.

In **1989**, Pastor László Tőkés and his congregation members were **persecuted** because they spoke up against the despotism of communist dictator Ceausescu. Today, history repeats itself once again. **László Tőkés**, Bishop of the Reformed Church in Romania, and his colleagues are **now harassed** because they would not accept the despotic decision of the local authorities. The decision has **deprived** the Reformed school children of their sports-ground. This **escalated** round of **hatred** began shortly after Romania's integration into the European Union.

There is no reason to deprive any students the opportunity for physical education. But to then donate the confiscated site to an Orthodox parish presumes political corruption. In essence, **the local authority stole the property** and the Orthodox Church accepted it. In addition, we point out that the Orthodox Church building was **stolen from the Catholic Church**. This is **theft** and blatant **greed** by the Holy Trinity **Orthodox Church**.

During **communism**, the Orthodox Church "expanded" by **seizing** thousands of church **properties** and NEVER restoring rightful ownership to the minority churches in Romania. In addition, since **1989**, more than 2,000 Orthodox churches and some 40 monasteries have been built with **public funds** in Transylvania's **non-Orthodox** regions.



**The sports-ground "behind bars":** much spoken about openness and Christian love – while welding bars on stolen property

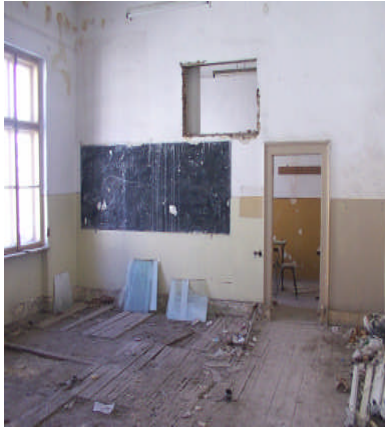
In **2007**, the 416 Reformed school students are still **deprived** of their physical education. They can only look at their former sports-ground (now vacant) from behind a fence. Yes, vacant; the Orthodox Church has kept it closed but adds extra security bars, welded to the fence, to keep out the children.

In summer 2005, the Directory Council of the Királyhágómellék Reformed Church District presented a plea to the court. On 16 June 2006, the **Administrative Court** of Bihor County announced a verdict, regarding the case of the sports-ground. The court verdict stated that the local council's adjudication to award the sports-ground to the Holy Trinity (Sfânta Treime) Orthodox Parish had been illegal. Both the local council and the Orthodox Parish **appealed** against the decision made by the court.

## A conflict background

Between 1945 and 1989, the former Communist regime illegally confiscated 2,140 properties from the four traditional Hungarian churches (Roman Catholic, Reformed, Unitarian, and Lutheran). Despite various government ordinances, two laws (501/2002 and 247/2005), and countless deadlines for implementation, the Hungarian denominations have **regained possession of only a tiny fraction of their property, as of today.**

In 2003, restitution was granted for the Lorántffy Zsuzsanna Reformed High School. The property was returned in a very poor condition, with **intentional damage inflicted** immediately before its return.



**Condition** of the classrooms of the Lorántffy High School **upon restitution**

416 Hungarian-speaking Reformed students attend the Lorántffy High School. The Reformed Church has spent huge amounts of money on renovation, from its own resources and international donations.



The Andrei Șaguna public school was renovated with taxes from the entire population, including the **parents of the Lorántffy students**. When will minority schools get similar consideration?

In the meantime, the public school of Romanian-speaking students which used the church property had been moved to a building which was completely renovated with **public funds**...

The confiscation of the sports-ground is a **human rights violation**. This denies our children physical education and no chance for any outside activities.

**It violates the principle of equal chances** for the students of Lorántffy Zsuzsanna High School with the students of the Andrei Șaguna School.

It basically breaks the legal decree according to which the approval of the **Ministry of Education** is required whenever liquidating a sports facility. Further, if the sports facility gets “liquidated”, the High School would lose a critical accreditation requirement. It could never keep its legal accreditation: **religious discrimination**.

**This particular case** of the municipality, acting in favor of the Orthodox Church, and the Orthodox Parish, usurping the place of worship originally used by Greek Catholics and aggressively seizing the tiny sports-ground of the Reformed high-school, **gained country-wide significance** in June 2006, when Orthodox archbishop Bartolomeu Anania issued a communiqué.

The Orthodox archbishop’s communiqué, stated the Orthodox Church would like to **divide** ALL the Romanian-speaking Greek Catholic properties, based on the **proportion** of their adherents. Since 1948, the atheist-Communist regime, **confiscated** 2,000 Greek Catholic places of worship. In effect, this would constitute the **theft** of the **vast majority of properties**, legitimatizing their illegal seizure.

Furthermore, if the Orthodox Church does not receive the properties (a legal decree), the archbishop has **threatened** the political parties to take sides in the next electoral campaign, ending its neutral position.



## Recent developments

The Reformed Church was promised intervention – amongst others – by the president of the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania, **Romania's Vice-Premier** Béla Markó. There has been **no progress**. **Dozens of letters** addressed to the local authorities, the state authorities, the local Orthodox authorities and the national Orthodox authorities, by the Reformed Church **have gone unanswered**.

The appeal handled by the **Appellate Court in Oradea** was **tampered** with and **information intentionally withheld** from the Reformed Church and Árpád Kolozsi, their lawyer. Árpád Kolozsi was shocked to find the sports-ground **appeal re-written** to avoid answering the original question: “Was it legal to appropriate the sports-ground?”

Further, the information of the local council's decision to confiscate the sports-ground was withheld for six months in 2004. This **eliminated** any legal opportunity by the Reformed Church to file a petition to dismiss the action legally, in due time. This is outright **fraud perpetrated** by the **Appellate Court**.

**The small sports-ground case highlights the major problems in Romania today: discrimination; ethnic, religious, and/or financial; theft; fraud; political corruption; police harassment; political prejudice; dictatorship by the Orthodox Church, which displays arrogance, hypocrisy, and expansionism-at-any-cost.**

At that point, the Reformed Church realised that there was **no more hope** in fair settlement in the given **pseudo-democratic** circumstances. To protest their injustice, **they launched the following civil disobedience events:**

- Many people attend a demonstration held every Sunday at the locked entrance of the playground.
- Ecumenical worship services are held every afternoon for fair settlement.
- Church bells are rung every hour from noon to midnight in the Reformed churches of the city.
- A local pastor led a one-week hunger-strike and praying protest.
- Many students come to play football on the confiscated sports-ground on Wednesday afternoons.



**Civil obedience:** Lorántffy students vs. Reformed Church team on the confiscated sports-ground



While “secretly” photographed from the Orthodox manse... and inspected on the spot.

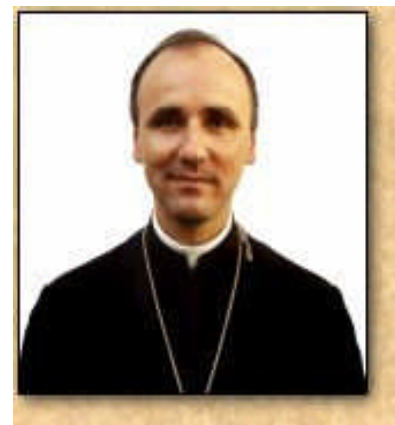


These acts brought much public sympathy to the children deprived of their physical education.

**Each student was presented a ball.** The 416 balls were signed by the students. On 4 February 2007, the students decided to keep them on the “safely locked” sports ground, until it is “unlocked” for them.



Bishop József Tempfli expressed the deep solidarity of the **Roman Catholic Church** with the efforts of the Reformed Church on behalf of the children. He declared that the Orthodox Church is illegally usurping a place of worship. **Bishop Tempfli** concluded his communiqué with the commandment: **“THOU SHALT NOT STEAL.”**



**Bishop Bercea** also assured the Reformed Church about the solidarity of the **Greek Catholic Church** in this conflict

These recent developments have brought much **shame, confusion,** and **panic** within the Orthodox Church: **on Wednesday, 7 February, fully armed, anti-terrorist corps, wearing concealed masks, was dispatched to threaten Bishop Tőkés and young school children protesting for the restitution of their confiscated sports-ground.**

There is no reason to dispatch armed police upon innocent children and fellow Christians.

- **Is this the real face of the Orthodox Church?**
- Could we call **ecumenism** an act of betrayal against children and high officials of a sister church?
- Does **hiding** behind fully armed, anti-terrorist corps provide **peace** in preparation for the **3rd European Ecumenical Assembly**, which is to be held in September 2007, in Sibiu/Hermannstadt/Nagyszeben, Transylvania, **Romania?**
- Will creating an **atmosphere of intra-state terror** compensate for a lack of Christian love?

These are some questions which need to be answered very soon.



## Where are the terrorists?



*Déjà vu – 1989: László Tőkés and Reformed Church members threatened by an arrogant police officer.*



**Masked anti-terrorists dispatched against children.**

**Children were not allowed to bring out one single ball.**



**The old, rusty sign says: “DO NOT BLOCK THE ENTRANCE!”**

Previous Transylvanian Monitor issues are available at: [www.emnt.org](http://www.emnt.org)

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