



THE MOVEMENT FOR SPIRITUAL INTEGRATION IN
ABSOLUTE

MISA

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Religious Discrimination of MISA - a Political
“Exchange Currency”

The case of the Romanian yoga school MISA – **a follow up** after the
Bucharest high level meeting of June 2007

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Dear Mr. chairman, dear ambassadors, ladies and gentlemen,
I am from Romania and for the moment work and live in Copenhagen, Denmark. I am representing in front of you the “Movement for spiritual integration into the Absolute – M.I.S.A” – a yoga movement having more than 300.000 students and about 35.000 active students (yoga practitioners).

After being presented in the high level meeting of OSCE in Bucharest June 2007 the situation with the yoga school MISA was not improved but the opposite happened. Here I am giving you a follow up on the case and I will begin first with a briefing since it is representing – according to some of the human rights activists that were investigating the case - one of the most severe cases of discrimination and abuse in the post communist Romania as for sure one that reached the media attention in an abnormal and abusive scale.

Actions before 1989

In 1972, in the communist Romania an advanced yoga practitioner (Mr. Gregorian Bivolaru) begin to teach yoga in a so-called “house of culture” in Bucharest. Soon after, the yoga course become famous especially among students and teachers in University and the number of yoga students rapidly increased.

The totalitarian communist regime started to put pressure on the yoga students that was following these yoga courses and on the person of Mr. Gregorian Bivolaru to stop the yoga courses.

In 1982 yoga, martial arts and any eastern spiritual disciplines were taken out of law and all the courses within these disciplines were declared illegal. Despite this fact Mr. Bivolaru and other advanced yoga teachers continued to practice and teach yoga secretly. For this reason Mr. Bivolaru and other teachers were arrested several times, and they went through the full communist oppression mechanism that now you already know it: torturing, beating, forced labor camps.

In 23rd of January 1990 – after the anti-communist revolution, a group of 22 teachers lead by Mr. Bivolaru (who was just released from the prison) set up the “Movement for Spiritual Integration into the Absolute - MISA”. Immediately after, yoga courses were open all over the country and the number of students in these courses is continuously increasing.

Abuses after 1898

In September 1990 a vast media campaign against the yoga students and against the teachers was starting (in September the new yoga classes starts!). Yoga practitioners were accused in all the media of several crimes: sexual abuses, brain washing people, homicide in black magic rituals, drugs, and prostitution. Of course the police didn't start any action **due to the fact that these were only incredible lies.** Since then – 1990 – every year we experience one or two big campaigns against the organization and against the yoga teachers and students. The accusations are almost the same every time; only recently accusations of terrorism and being a paramilitary organization dealing with weapons were added (probably because of the new international situation).

In this context, the Association for Defending the Human Rights – The Helsinki Committee, notified in 1996, after they made their own inquiries and made reports regarding the M.I.S.A.

Association, reports in which they express their worries towards the repeated persecutions to which M.I.S.A. and its students have to suffer.

In the above-mentioned reports, they agree that **“there is nothing illegal in the activity of M.I.S.A. members and there is nothing to motivate a campaign against them”**.

The reports showing the abuses against MISA came out in 1997, 1998, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006.

In March 2004, several raids took place; they were filmed and broadcasted on TV for many days, without protecting the faces of people shown barely dressed. Later, personal belongings seized during searches (family pictures, personal agendas etc – abusively offered to journalists by prosecutors) were shown on TV, aiming to discredit the detainees and pretending that they were proof of crimes such as drug dealing, prostitution, guns possession, although no such accusation was ever made but on TV. No one was put on preventive arrest or detained following these raids – which raises serious question marks about the legitimacy of the huge display of force, however the lives of many yoga students became a nightmare, some of them lost their jobs, their social status, or even their families.

605 people (out of which 76% with university degrees) gave statements about the serious persecutions and discriminations they underwent following the raids and the media campaign, for the only reason that they admitted having practiced yoga at MISA yoga school. Many persons are mistreated at their work place (in two extreme cases people were fired from the Army and the Police, cases of Paul Ivanov and Lucian Gradinariu), a judge (Simona Lungu) was forced to resign following absurd charges of immorality and an aggressive press campaign that affected her image and credibility, many persons are rejected by their families, sometimes they are not even allowed to visit their children, neighbors are scratching their cars or proffering insults, children are marginalized at school if their parents are known yoga practitioners, and the examples could continue.

An example of severe abuse

Among the terrible experiences that many yoga students underwent following the mass hysteria created by the authorities with the media support, one stands out. Dana Craescu, 20, a passionate of poetry, coming from a small Romanian town, was sequestered by her own family and forcefully kept in a psychiatric hospital and later at her family’s house for almost 9 months (January – October 2005), with no contact with outsiders, with the purpose of *“removing yoga of her mind”*. A similar event had happen in 2003, but after 3 days spent in the hospital the doctor released her considering she was the victim of an *“emotional abuse of her parents”*.

During the 8 weeks spent in the hospital in 2005, with the complicity of a local doctor, she was given extremely strong medication, normally used for schizophrenia, medication that affected her mind, her weight (she gained 15 kilos), her overall physical condition, including her capacity to procreate. The complaints made to authorities by her fiancée, friends, by herself to a local police officer, were ignored, and a prosecutor abusively approved the treatment inflicted upon Dana Craescu, allowing her family and her doctor to continue to abuse and mistreat her. She managed to escape in October 2005 by deceiving those who were watching her, and she came back to Bucharest where she married her fiancée.

Social consequences of the persecutions campaign

High officials, magistrates, ministers, members of the parliament etc. took a stand and publicly accused MISA yoga school, Gregorian Bivolaru, yoga students, requesting drastic punishments, the shut down of the yoga school, completely ignoring the presumption of innocence and the lack of any serious evidence, thus **instigating the public opinion to hate and discrimination**.

Since March 2004, hundreds of yoga students (especially young women) throughout Romania were visited by police officers or invited to **hearings** by prosecutors, without being told in what capacity they are heard, and asked tendentious questions about their yoga practice and possible relationships with Gregorian Bivolaru.

In the case of two doctors (Cristian Boerescu, Otilia Craciun), yoga practitioners, their neighbors were questioned by authorities (but wearing plain clothes), who were insistently **urging the neighbors** to give incriminatory statements about the behavior of the doctors.

Over 20 companies belonging to yoga students were **repeatedly controlled** by the Financial Guard, both before and after the events of March 2004. The controls after March 2004 were heavily mediatized, inducing to the public the idea that any yoga practitioner with a private business is by default a criminal (ex. Costica Cojocaru, Andrei Gamulea, Catalin Visterneanu). Some of these companies could not present the official documents requested, including fiscal reports, since they had been seized during the searches. Interestingly, most of the questions asked during these controls were about the yoga practice and MISA yoga school, and in some cases the owners were requested even **written statements about their relations with MISA and Gregorian Bivolaru** (ex. Elisabeta Ionescu), although none were connected in any way to the activity of the company. The activity of these companies was prejudiced not only by the confiscation of legal documents, or the fines they had to pay, but the owners lost during the searches the results of years of scientific researches, such as files with studies, pictures, descriptions and properties of hundreds of medicinal herbs, loss which affects the existence even of such companies (case of Andrei Gamulea). Even relatives of some yoga practitioners, who had no connection to yoga themselves, were visited by Financial Guard and other relevant controlling authorities, and asked questions about yoga, not about the activity of their own firm! Despite all these “efforts”, nothing illegal was ever found in the activity of all these firms.

Actions without any result from MISA

Approximately **100 memorandums**, accompanied by declarations, images, statistics, were submitted to all institutions that have responsibilities in such situations: Prosecutors’ Office of Bucharest Appeal Court, General Prosecutor’s Office, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration, Senate and Chamber of Deputies (both to individual members of the Parliament, and to Parliamentary commissions, such as Commission for Human Rights, for Justice, for National Defense etc), Presidency, Prime Minister, Superior Council of Magistracy, Romanian Secret Service. None of these institutions took any measure, or at least decided to start a proper investigation. In the great majority of the cases we didn’t even receive an official answer (although the authorities are bound by law to answer within 30 days to any petition), and in the few cases when we received replies the respective institutions declined their competence and redirected the memorandums to the Superior Council of Magistracy or to the General Prosecutor’s Office. The interesting part is that even these two institutions redirected the memorandums between themselves.

Over **250 street demonstrations** were also organized since March 2004, most of them taking place in front of the institutions mentioned above. Although audiences were requested every time, to allow the representatives of our school to expose the problems we have been facing, we were granted no more than 10-12 audiences in total, none of them leading to any concrete result. Only during the last month we have organized daily protests in front of the Superior Council of Magistracy, the only result being that they moved their internal meeting in other locations, not to be bothered by the noise.

Synthesis of the abuses against MISA yoga school

Unfortunately the discrimination doesn't have anything to do with the regime that is running the country here is the main political periods in the last 35 years and their contribution to the abuses against MISA:

- During the communist regime
 - 1971 – 1989: yoga classes monitored by *Securitate*, Gregorian Bivolaru (MISA's spiritual mentor) imprisoned several times, yoga banned as “conspiracy against communist regime”
- 1991 (first democratic regime, the Front of National Salvation) – MISA calumniated in the press
- 1992 – 1996 (Iliescu's social-democratic regime) – hundreds of calumnious articles in the press, instigating to hate
 - 1995 – bomb attempt to Gregorian Bivolaru's house
 - 1996 – report of Helsinki Committee (APADOR-CH) on abuses and aggressions against MISA
- 1996 – 2000 (Democratic Convention, president Constantinescu) – unprecedented attack against MISA, violent press campaigns as well as direct actions
 - 1996 – antiterrorist forces stop a yoga class, yogis publicly blamed as dangerous criminals, although no legal action followed. Abuses stayed unpunished.
 - 1997 – report of Amnesty International on authorities abuses against MISA
- 2000 – 2004 (Iliescu's social-democratic regime): instigation against MISA and Bivolaru, violation of fundamental rights
 - 2002 – 2003: TV shows presenting lists with yoga practitioners (names, addresses)
 - 18 March 2004 – 300 police officers, gendarmes, prosecutors, secret service agents performed house searches in 16 private locations, using masks and military weapons
 - Gregorian Bivolaru arrested; criminal file set up; an attempt to fraudulent border crossing set up; **in January 2006 Sweden grants him political asylum on grounds of religious discrimination**
- 2004 – 2007 (ruling of “*Dreptate si Adevar*” Alliance): over 50 yoga teachers and MISA leaders abusively charged with persons trafficking. 70 private residences of yoga practitioners under sequester.
- Within 1997-2006: a total of 2678 calumnious press articles
- Up to this date **no evidence** to prove accusations raised by politicians and secret services over past 30 years

Even thou so many accusations were thrown against MISA and its students, now after more than 35 years the state authorities didn't came with any proves or with any explanations. The

abuses continues despite the fact that many yoga schools in Europe were organizing protest actions in front of the Romanian embassy in Paris, London, Copenhagen, Helsinki, Prague, Budapest, Berlin and so on.

Now while we are talking, there is an arresting warrant on the name of Mr. Gregorian Bivolaru and he is searched by the Romanian police. He is having the status of political asylum in Sweden and on his name were received in Sweden more than 14 letters of treat that are under the investigation of the Swedish police.

Follow up after the Bucharest conference in June 2007

Since we have presented this information in Bucharest the court case started against Mr. Gregorian Bivolaru and 20 more yoga teachers. The court case started with another abuse that is following the same pattern that was described in the previous pages.

In the same time as the files are handed to the court, the indictment was published in the on-line edition of “Jurnalul National”, creating a great prejudice to the court case. The prosecutor house is denying any connection with this event, the judge house is also denying any connection. The indictment is still simultaneously appearing in the court house and in the media.

Continuing the set of abuses against the yoga school, the indictment is containing four studies regarding the MISA yoga school even if the accusations are only against some private persons. In recent declarations from different officials we hear that the authorities are not having anything against MISA yoga school, the whole trial is against private persons that are breaching the law.

The indictment of this new court file is breaking not only the innocence presumption (that is ensured by Constitution in Romania) but also many other human rights, according to Mr. Gabriel Andreescu, in a report published in the “New magazine for Human rights” (3/2007).

Conclusions

Taking in consideration all these facts we respectfully ask you who hold the political power to help this organization for being properly protected against any political abuse.

Making research I learned that MISA is just one little part from what it appear to be large phenomena that is going on underground: the victims of political interests and political abuse.

What will be the reason to attack such groups as MISA yoga school other than to accumulate some political capital? But these irresponsible actions are having some side effects that in our opinion have to be underlined here:

- In the general tendency for rediscovering the spiritual values, tendency that in the last years become more obvious, compromising the religious and spiritual freedom for small political interest it is generating a general reaction that might lead to a corruption of all the spiritual efforts that are done now.
- The pattern of using the small groups for different purposes in order to manipulate larger groups represent a violation of the human rights that give a dangerous precedent and – in my opinion – is just a generalization of the anti-Semitism.
- Letting this to happen is creating an insecure spiritual environment that is inhibiting the free development of the spiritual initiative, situation that afterward will tend to kill the spiritual search and spiritual values while they are too little to survive.

Since Romanian citizens are discriminated, harassed and persecuted by the very institutions supposed to protect them, we have no choice but to ask for the **support of the international community**, of the democratic states, where the justice is fair and independent, and the fundamental rights and freedoms are sacred. Otherwise there is a high risk that the “original” concepts about justice, truth, respect for the law, will be successfully “exported” into the European Union now, with the accession of Romania. We hereby send another serious call for help in the effort to clarify the situation of the Romanian yoga school MISA.

Recommendations

All the mentioned facts are in our opinion a good reason to reflect deeper at the European level upon the religious freedom and the way this issue can be misused by the authorities in order to create smokescreens or to gain political capital.

We recommend the representatives of OSCE to organize a fact finding mission in Romania to clarify the situation of the MISA yoga school that for the moment remain under a great deal of incertitude, affecting the work and life of thousand of people.

We recommend the creation of an international commission in Romania, in which the representatives of MISA will be invited to participate and under the supervision of ODIHR – OSCE. This commission will organize hearings with all the parts and will recommend the solutions that take into account all the facts and circumstances. In this way the whole case will find a transparent and fair solution for all parts. **This recommendation is an urgent one!**

Thank you for you concern

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