

MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF HUNGARY

MINISTER

January 10, 2012

Dear Commissioner,

I have the honour to refer to your letter dated 16 December 2011 concerning the Hungarian Act on the Right to Freedom of Conscience and Religion, and on the Legal Status of Churches, Religious Denominations and Religious Communities. I would also like to recall the letter of Deputy State Secretary Gergely Pröhle, addressed to you at the beginning of September 2011 highlighting the background and main features of the Act.

I am pleased to be able to provide new information related to recent developments in connection with the Act.

First, I would like to emphasize that the original Act on Churches, adopted by Parliament on 12 July 2011, did not come into effect on 1 January 2012. On 19 December the Constitutional Court annulled it on the basis of procedural shortcomings. An amended version of the Act was adopted on 30 December 2011 by the Parliament.

In the recently adopted new law the Hungarian Parliament recognizes fourteen churches. This list is open and other organizations will be included soon. 82 religious organizations currently operating in Hungary and not listed in the Act have submitted their request for registration as a church. As a positive consequence of the transitional measures adopted by Parliament these religious organizations did not lose their church status on 1 January 2012. The Parliament will decide on their registration before the end of February. The Parliamentary Committee dealing with Church-related issues involved formally the Hungarian Academy of Sciences into the examination of the specific requests. According to the latest information at least 37 of the 82 religious organizations are complying with the necessary requirements for obtaining the official church status.

May I suggest to you to return to this issue at the end of February after this complex procedure will have been finished.

In connection with your remarks on the registration requirements provided for by the Act, I would like to emphasize that the requirement of a 100 years of proven existence in any part of the world has become optional, 20 years of operation on the territory of Hungary is now sufficient for the registration. In addition, requests for acceding to church status can be submitted directly to the relevant Committee of the Parliament while in the previous version of the law the Minister of Justice and Public Administration was planned to be the addressee of such requests.

Dear Commissioner,

I sincerely hope that information on these recent developments provide significant clarifying elements for continuing the constructive dialogue we maintain on the issue of the Hungarian Act on the Right to Freedom of Conscience and Religion, and on the Legal Status of Churches, Religious Denominations and Religious Communities.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of a large, stylized initial 'J' followed by a series of loops and a final flourish.

János Martonyi