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ROMANIAN PRIEST TRAVELING 3,000+ MILES TO BLESS MONUMENTS TO ROMANIAN HEROES IN RUSSIA



Fr. Ștefan Stanciu from the Chencea district of Bucharest is currently in the midst of a trip to bless a number of grave monuments throughout Russia to Romanian WW2 prisoners of war who died in Soviet gulags. Together with the Romanian ambassador to Moscow, Vasile Soare, the priest will travel more than 3,000 miles to bless seven monuments.

The monuments to those who died between 1941 and 1952 were erected in 2018 by the Romanian state, reports the Basilica News Agency with reference to Soare's Facebook page.

The first two stops were in Chebakovo and Mikhailovo, near Nizny Novgorod, where

111 Romanian soldiers are buried. The delegation blessed the Romanian monument in the multinational cemetery in Chebakovo on June 3, with His Grace Bishop Benjamin of Rybinsk and representatives of local authorities in attendance. The delegation reached Mikhailovo the next day, where it was welcome by the local parish priest.

At each monument, Ambassador Soare gave a brief lecture on Romanian prisoners in Russia and on the significance of Heroes' Day. Romanian Heroes' Day is celebrated on the feast of the Ascension and is observed with military and religious festivities at monuments dedicated to national heroes. The Romanian soldiers, whose country was under German occupation and so were forced to fight on the side of the Axis powers with the Nazis, were imprisoned in Soviet Russia along with many German soldiers. These prisoners were rarely released and remained in the prison camps even long after the Soviet victory, eventually dying in captivity. Because the Romanians fought on the enemy's side against the Soviet Union, and many Russians still remember the cruelty of the Axis armies in Soviet territories, Russians do not consider such prisoners to be heroes. But taking into consideration the confusion of the times, when Romania was very anti-communist and yet to suffer under post-war communist rule, as well as Romania's Orthodox faith, the Russian Church nevertheless respects the Romanian delegation's desire to honor their fallen compatriots.

The blessing of the monuments was celebrated with the singing of Christ is Risen in both Romanian and Slavonic.

The delegation reached the third stop in Usta on the feast of the Ascension and Romanian Heroes' Day.



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