

Petition to European Union on Colorblind's condition in Romania

Abstract. By the will of the legal authorities of Romania, its colorblind citizens (myself included) are not allowed to get a driver's license, unlike any other EU country (and not only), to my knowledge. Given that all the efforts to solve the situation internally have failed, I turn to the ear of EU to ask for a bold recommendation that will help bring an end to this shameful discrimination.

Colorblindness is a mostly inherited genetic anomaly that affects an estimated 8 percent of white (European descent) male population, and about 0.5 of the females. In Romania, then, there would be about five hundred thousand adults (18+ years) with this condition whom by the existing laws^[1] and ophthalmologic practice are not allowed to obtain a driver's license.

A person affected by color-blindness (the term is highly misleading) cannot tell the difference between certain colors, usually close hues, but certainly sees some color (a different one that a normal-sight person sees). By the type of light-sensitive cone cell affected, color deficiencies are classified as follows:

- *deuteranopia* - green blind (lacking green-sensitive cones, or, green-sensitive cones 'understand' the green as red)
- *deuteranomaly* (the most common, ~5% of white males, myself included) - green weak, anomalous perception of green, shifted towards red
- *protanopia* - red blind (lacking red-sensitive cones, or, red-sensitive cones 'understand' the red as green)
- *protanomaly* - red weak, anomalous perception of red, shifted toward green
- *monochromacy* - complete colorblindness, the color perception is limited to black, white and shades of gray

In September 2006, I was re-diagnosed with colorblindness, and the ophthalmologist verdict was "inapt for driving". In short time I started to read and inform myself in detail on this color perception anomaly, and the condition of the colorblinds in other countries. With the help of a Romanian colorblind who lives in the United States, I wrote a document entitled "Colorblindness and the rights of the citizens in Romania"^[2] where I presented the facts and asked for a reconsideration of the legal restrictions. I sent the document at a hospital in each of the 41 counties of Romania, to Romanian Ophthalmologic Society, to government's Health Department and to four universities of medicine and pharmacy. I've sent the document through email to the main televisions, radios and newspapers. I received exactly two answers, one from an ophthalmologist (who agreed with my cause), and an official one from Health Department, where they told me that the document was handed to Ophthalmologic Commission (a Health Department consultative commission) for analysis and decision. The Ophthalmologic Commission did not bother to answer. After some months, I called its president, physician Monica Pop, who told me she did not even consider to answer because under no circumstance she would approve colorblinds to be drivers, as long as she decides, because of the many accidents (she maintains) that are caused by them, offering "strong" arguments such as a colorblind biker hitting a red car, supposedly because he did not see it (!?). However, American Academy of Ophthalmology says: "*Studies show no association between color deficiency and reduced driving performance, and this component of visual sensory ability should not be included in vision tests to assess an individual's ability to drive safely*"^[3]. But the chief absurdity is a consequence of the latest legal updates in Romania^[4], which makes possible for a Romanian (colorblind) to get a driver's license in any EU country, license that is now automatically recognized in Romania, but (still) does not allow colorblinds to get a driver's license in their own country.

Hoping to get other supporters for this cause, I wrote to the Center for Assistance for Non-government Organizations^[5], Association for Defending Human Rights in Romania^[6], also to the ophthalmologist that declared me inapt, modified some images to carry the message visually and posted it on an Internet group with over 6500 Romanians^[7], and started threads of discussion on three Romanian (mostly driving-related) websites^[8,9,10]. The responses were almost non-existent,

except from the colorblinds on internet forums, who generally encouraged me to continue. Finally, I started a blog^[11] to document in detail the history of this action. There I posted all the relevant information concerning colorblindness and the struggle to obtain freedom for colorblinds to be drivers. I also collected legislation excerpts or official positions from 5 countries (Holland, Canada and New Zealand, United States, Germany) that explicitly says colorblindness is not an obstacle for safe driving (at least for personal/non-commercial licenses).

In 29 June 2007, I sent a last letter to the Ophthalmologic Commission (and to the Romanian Ophthalmologic Society) to ask for arguments that motivate their decision not to allow colorblinds to be drivers. Allowing for a month for a possible answer to come, a week for the letter traveling time, and an extra 'grace' week, we get a date of about 15 August (today). Needless to say, I received no answer. This is the reason I appeal to SolvIt in this specific day. After trying all possibilities inside the borders of Romania, and getting in response mostly indifference and neglect (peculiarities of non-democratic governments - heritage of communism), I saw myself in the need of asking for help from outside.

The colorblinds legal condition in Romania is restrictive and ambiguous, and we lack even basic official public information from some professional ophthalmological society regarding the unavailable occupations, the effect on everyday life, and so on. To my knowledge there is no government program to test and inform pupils and students on colorblindness starting from an early age in educational institutions, to guide them in choosing their adult studies and careers. The impossibility of obtaining legally a driver's license in Romania if one is colorblind is just the tip of the iceberg of problems concerning this widespread color vision anomaly, but solving just this could be the beginning of increased care from authorities and ophthalmologists for people that are affected.

I hope this petition succeeded to draw attention on the situation of people with color vision deficiencies, and will prompt a quick and positive reply, helping bring one more freedom for a significant number of Romanians, and add a new worthy trophy to the list of solved cases.

[1] <http://discromat.wordpress.com/2007/07/11/ordinele-87-si-350/>

An excerpt from two legal orders (87/2003 and 350/2003) which regulate the medical conditions for a person to be able to get a driver's license

[2] <http://tomoiağa.ro/discromat.html>

"Discromatopsia și drepturile cetățeanului în România" (Colorblindness and the rights of the citizen in Romania)

[3] <http://www.aa.org/education/statements/loader.cfm?url=/commonspot/security/getfile.cfm&PageID=1208>

American Academy of Ophthalmology - Vision Requirements for Driving

[4] <http://codulrutier.ro>

Romanian Driving Law. See Article 24

[5] <http://www.centras.ro/>

Website of Center for Assistance for Non-government Organizations

[6] <http://www.apador.org/>

Website of Association for Defending Human Rights in Romania

[7] http://groups.yahoo.com/group/romania_eu_list/message/44113

Visual message on Internet Discussion Group Romania EU List

[8] <http://www.daciaclub.ro/Discromatopsia-si-drepturile-cetateanului-in-Romani-t68786.html>

Dacia Club forum

[9] <http://www.motociclism.ro/forum/index.php?showtopic=86376>

Motorcyclist forum

[10] <http://forum.softpedia.com/index.php?showtopic=152161&st=60&p=2688632&#entry2688632>

General interest website forum

[11] <http://discromat.wordpress.com>

Sunt discromat și vreau șofer (I'm colorblind and I want driver) - my (Vasile Tomoiagă) blog on colorblind's condition in Romania