

THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ROMANIAN HUMANITARIAN MOVEMENT AND ITS SOCIAL ROLE

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ABSTRACT: ROMANIA SIGNED THE RESOLUTIONS OF THE GENEVA INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION IN 1864 AND RATIFIED THEM IN 1874, TWO YEARS LATER (JULY 4, 1876) MARKING THE BIRTH OF THE RED CROSS SOCIETY OF ROMANIA. THE ROMANIAN HUMANITARIAN MOVEMENT JOINED THE INTERNATIONAL ONE, WORKING ON ALL EUROPEAN BATTLE FRONTS. ITS SOCIAL IMPACT HAS BEEN A PARTICULARLY STRONG ONE AND MANAGED TO MOBILIZE A LARGE NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS WHO GAVE THEIR SERVICES TO CARE FOR THE SICK AND WOUNDED FROM THE FRONT, TO PROVIDE FOOD, MEDICINES AND CLOTHING FOR BOTH MILITARY AND CIVILIANS, IN HELPING PRISONERS OF WAR, BOTH ROMANIAN AND OTHER NATIONALITIES, TO RAISE FUNDS NECESSARY TO CONDUCT HUMANITARIAN ACTIVITIES.

KEYWORDS: HUMANITARIAN MOVEMENT, SOCIETY, BENEVOLENT, VOLUNTEERS, WARS.

In its historical course, human society has experienced numerous conflicts, more or less violent, which resulted in many casualties, often collateral from those directly involved in fighting. The bellicose side of the man could be seen ever since the childhood of humanity, social evolution perfecting both the means and methods of war, which led in time to the increase of the number of dead and wounded. Fights small or large have always been socially accepted as normal acts in human or interstate relationships, as reflected in the emergence of a so-called art of war. An improper expression, as a violent occupation with gruesome results cannot be considered art, which necessarily involves the notion of beauty, delight for the eye and the soul, what violence cannot do. If part of the population was always for the war, mostly rejected the practice because of its adverse consequences were felt by everyone in society, many innocents falling victims to battles that were not theirs.

Like previous centuries the nineteenth century was also the scene of battles, one of the most violent and with the greatest tribute of victims being the one of Solferino on 24 June 1859, a battle in which the armies of Franco-Sardinians led by Napoleon III fought the Austrian army led by Franz Josef I. One of the witnesses of this battle was the Swiss Henry Dunant (1828-1910) who had come to meet Napoleon III in a matter of business and arrived on the battlefield after the end of fighting to be horrified by the image nightmare of corpses piled and of wounded calling for help that they had no one else to receive it from, prompting him that for three days to help the unfortunate wounded, his example being followed by other volunteers inspired by his

exhortation "Siamo tutti fratelli" (we are all brothers), from their care benefiting both the French and their enemies [1].

H. Durant returned to Switzerland where, to escape the nightmarish images remaining in mind, wrote a book called *A memory of Solferino*, which he published on its own funding in November 1862 and send it to the European royal families, to military and political leaders, philanthropists and friends in order to sensitize them with the presentation of the horrors of war [2]. But his book is of particular importance in the idea that each country during peacetime, should start a company of volunteers to help the wounded in wartime and an international agreement to provide a neutral status as wounded and as caretakers. The resounding success of the book and the ideas has made, on 9 February 1863, the Public Utility Company in Geneva, led by lawyer Gustave Moynier, to adopt the ideas of H. Dunant and to create a committee chaired by General Guillaume Henri Dufour, with the following members: Gustave Moynier, Henry Dunant, dr. Théodore Maunoir and dr. Louis Appia [3]. This "Comité des Cinq", which will take the name "International Committee for the aid of injured soldiers", turned in 1875 into "the International Committee of the Red Cross", and would convene, in October 26th 1863, an international conference in Geneva [4].

This conference was attended by representatives from 16 countries and four philanthropic institutions, which adopted a resolution of 10 articles stipulating the establishment in each country of a society to help in wartime, by all means, the armed forces in battle, and the necessity during peacetime to procure all materials considered useful for helping the wounded, the training, education and activity voluntary nurses and by *Article 8* adopted the hallmark of the health personnel, which consisted of a red cross on a white background [5].

These resolutions adopted at the first conference on international humanitarian law are of particular importance in that they define the doctrinal underpinnings and businesses on which were founded the first national societies of the Red Cross, and that served as the constitutive charter until the adoption of the statutes of the international Red Cross in 1928 [6].

Romania signed the resolutions adopted at the Geneva Convention of 1864 but only ratified them in 1874. On July 4th 1876 it founded the Red Cross Society of Romania, the current headquarters of Coltea hospital in Bucharest being its first headquarters [7]. According to its Statute, Cap. I (General Provisions), Art. 1 states that "The National Red Cross Society of Romania (SNCRR), founded on July 4, 1876, is a public law, autonomous, non-governmental, apolitical and non-profit legal entity, of unlimited existence. It is organized and functions based on the Law on organization and functioning of the National Society of the Red Cross in Romania, has its own statute in accordance with the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols of 1977, to which Romania joined. SNCRR acts in accordance with the Fundamental Principles of the International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent and in Art. 4 states that" SNCRR, recognized by the International Committee of the Red Cross on August 23, 1876, a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent July 14, 1919, is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and this status ensures compliance with decisions and resolutions of the statutory bodies of the Movement [8].

The first elected president was Prince Dimitrie Ghica who served during 1876-1897, together with whom other personalities of the time signed the birth certificate of the society such as C.A. Rosetti, Dr. Carol Davila, Ion Ghica, Nicolae Cretzulescu George Gr. Cantacuzino, Dimitrie Sturza etc. [9].

The first Romanian Red Cross humanitarian mission took place on the Serbian-Turkish front south of the Danube, the first ambulance leaving on July 20, 1876, during the next year, with the triggering of the War of Independence (1877-1878), the Society would conduct a particularly prolific activity, helping with medical personnel, ambulances, trains, plumbing, sanitary materials and medicines [10]. Romanian volunteers have also offered aid during the First Balkan War (1885) contributing with medical personnel and two ambulances, in Serbia caring for three hospitals with a total of 110 beds, managing to care for a total of 625 sick and injured, with a total of 40,000 lei financial effort [11].

Over time the number of volunteers had been growing, and the involvement of the Company in all armed conflicts of the time was more intense. In peacetime, the Company was busy with the professional development of the Sisters of Charity, setting up a permanent school for nurses in 1891 and a hospital-school with 10 beds in 1892, institutions in which they organize sanitary courses for volunteers, also being concerned with its organization, the endowment with new medical equipment, the establishment of bacteriology laboratories and mobile medical teams, helping with the procurement of sanitary materials needed in wartime. Regardless of the belligerent countries, the Romanian Red Cross Society moved to help the sick and wounded, to work in the hospital set up on the war fronts or in different localities, was often helped by local people for who it did not matter that the need for medical care was that of their enemies. And not infrequently medical staff struggled with contagious diseases (cholera, typhoid fever), endangering their life and putting others in danger, in their willingness to help their fellow humans in distress.

Romanian Red Cross Society, through its Statutes of 1876, did not allow women to be part of the leadership, which led to the establishment in 1906 of the "Red Cross Society of ladies in Romania", the first President being Irina Câmpineanu [12]. Romanian ladies expressed their willingness to be involved in this voluntary activity, contributed to fundraising and volunteer staff training. In 1915 the two entities have merged into the Red Cross Society, which has experienced a great development under the patronage of Queen Mary, who by personal example mobilized enormous human and material forces during WWI. It is then that volunteers from all walks of life involved themselves in the movement and, through tremendous efforts, have managed to bring their contribution in hospitals, to provide food not only for the military but also for civilian population in need, they facilitated the correspondence of prisoners of war with families, helped with food, medicine and clothing the Romanian prisoners in enemy camps, obtaining financial donations and funds from external sources, provided medical and material aid to soldiers returning from the front after the end of hostilities, regardless of nationality.

The Society's activity continued in peacetime, and then during the Second World War, with a permanent growth. International affiliation remains important to maintain an ongoing relationship with the international governing bodies.

The International Humanitarian Movement to which Romania adhered and inside which it ceaselessly activated demonstrates the availability of the Romanian society for charitable acts, the empathy towards fellow human beings which need immediate and concrete help, the respect for human dignity by ensuring clothing, food and medical aid of those with physical infirmities, the desire for voluntary and free assistance of those in need. Through this practice of volunteering, the society has demonstrated its humanity and empathy with the people shouting for a help without which their life would be lost. The volunteers enrolled in the Red Cross fully

demonstrate these physical and spiritual availability, contributing to the strengthening of our humane side and of our opening towards the other.

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