

## “Soldiers of Peace”: the Transnational Activism of Romanian Great War Veterans, 1920-1939\*

This article details the aims, dynamics and outcomes of the transnational mobilization which Romanian Great War veterans undertook in the interwar era. In order to comprehensively analyse this case study the article focuses on the role that Romanian former fighters played within the international forums known as FIDAC (*Fédération Interalliée des Anciens Combattants*) and CIAMAC (*Conférence Internationale des Associations des Mutilés de guerre et Anciens Combattants*). At the same time, the ways in which local and national factors affected these veterans’ transnational activities are explored. The author also deals with the problem of how veterans from former Entente countries were bound by a shared “culture of victory”, thereby prioritizing, among their goals, the preservation of the Versailles and Trianon systems.

### *Introduction*

On 8 November 1925, the Romanian reserve lieutenant and Great War veteran Pierre Ciolan attended the inauguration of the Pierre de Haudroy war memorial in Aisne. Addressing the former servicemen at the event, who represented various former partners of the Entente, he stated that they all shared a mission: to protect the peace which they had contributed to create, having helped win the conflict.

*The comradeship of arms which unites us was not a casual and fleeting encounter on the battlefield. It was the thrilling manifestation of a lasting friendship, which is necessary for world peace! (Each among us) fought not to profit from Victory, but to defend his own country and the freedom of people.*<sup>1</sup>

Ciolan did not give this statement as a private participant, but in his capacity of vice president of the Inter-Allied Federation of Former Fighters (*Fédération Interalliée des Anciens Combattants*; FIDAC). This organization, which was founded in 1920, aimed at gathering Great War veterans on the winning side of the conflict

\* The development of this article has been supported by a grant awarded by the Institutul Cultural Român cultural institution.

<sup>1</sup> *L’Agent de Liaison. Régional Mensuel de La Voix du Combattant*, November 1925.

to preserve the post-war international *status quo*. Ciolan's declaration at Aisne is therefore a reminder that, in the interwar era, ex-servicemen from across Europe and beyond shared common interests, which they jointly mobilized to protect. Moreover, Ciolan's prominent position within FIDAC hints to the fact that Romanian ex-combatants occupied a prominent role within this transnational community.

In this article, I analyse how various leaders of the Romanian veterans mobilized at the transnational level, to pursue European peace, in addition to other, inter-related goals. My focus concerns mainly the activities these leaders undertook within prominent transnational veterans' forums, such as FIDAC and the International Conference of War Mutilates and Former Fighters (*Conférence Internationale des Associations des Mutilés de guerre et Anciens Combattants*; CIAMAC), a similar organization which existed between 1924 and 1939. In order to carry out this analysis, I employ mainly primary sources from Romanian state archives and public libraries – chiefly, items of personal correspondence, official explanatory reports and bulletins of veterans' associations – which mostly have not been widely disseminated.

Studying the transnational mobilization of the Romanian former fighters can provide stimulating insight into the political legacy of the Great War. First of all, this case study helps confirm recent perspectives on the political activities of European ex-servicemen in the interwar period. Previous scholarly approaches tended to assume that wartime experiences radicalized conspicuous numbers of veterans, compelling them to unreservedly embrace political violence and unconditionally support authoritarianism, thereby “brutalizing”<sup>2</sup> their political conduct. More recent approaches, however, underscore that the conflict's influence over ex-servicemen was rather muted. They point out that the war experience inspired a wide range of undertakings, including lobbying for welfare<sup>3</sup> and supporting democratic politics.<sup>4</sup> In keeping with these new outlooks, my analysis underscores that in Romania veterans were involved in numerous and diverse endeavours, espousing for the most part moderate political practices.

My case study also helps point out the validity of transnational approaches, with regard to studying the activism of Great War ex-servicemen. As mentioned above, between the two world wars veterans from different countries jointly mobilized to preserve peace, an issue which has recently received cross-national scholarly inquiry.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, scholars have underscored the various transfers and exchanges which took place between different national communities of former soldiers.<sup>6</sup> As will be shown below, Romanian ex-combatants were no strangers to

<sup>2</sup> MOSSE 1991: 159-181.

<sup>3</sup> COHEN 2001: 15-59, 149-187; PROST AND WINTER 2013: 19-50.

<sup>4</sup> MULLIGAN 2013: 141-158.

<sup>5</sup> DAVIES 2013: 187-203; BRÉGAIN 2016: 3-22.

<sup>6</sup> INGLIS 1993: 8-21; ALCALDE 2017: 159-194, 251-273.

both these trends. Their transnational mobilization made a relevant contribution to the European pacifist movement of the interwar era. Additionally, these veterans were influenced by various organizational practices which they adapted from foreign ex-servicemen's groups, while at the same time disseminating abroad their own principles and commodities.

### *1920-1929: Embracing FIDAC*

After two years of neutrality, in 1916 the Romanian Old Kingdom entered the Great War on the side of the Entente. Its main war aim was to obtain control over Transylvania, which by 1914 was inhabited by 2,827,419 ethnic Romanians (53,7% of the total population).<sup>7</sup> The kingdom's army, after being forced to retreat to the Moldavian principality at the end of 1916, by 1918 had taken control of Bessarabia and pushed the armies of the Central Powers out of Romania, conquering Bukovina and Transylvania in the process. In 1919 it entered the Banat, in addition to helping put down Béla Kun's budding Republic of Soviets in Hungary. Therefore, despite staggering military losses, amounting to 250,706 casualties (25% of all the men mobilized for the war effort),<sup>8</sup> Romania emerged victorious from the war. Between 1919 and 1920, the peace treaties of Saint Germain, Trianon and Paris legitimized, with varying degrees of effectiveness, the kingdom's annexation of Transylvania, Bukovina, parts of the Banat and Bessarabia, while the one of Neuilly returned control to it over the principality of Dobruja. With its annexations, the kingdom doubled its territory and population (the latter rising from 7.5 to 15.5 million inhabitants).<sup>9</sup>

During the conflict, the country had mobilized a significant contingent of its population for the fighting effort. In 1916, for instance, the army had included 813,378 soldiers, including 20,000 officers.<sup>10</sup> Consequently, there were numerous former fighters in Romania, after the end of hostilities. Nevertheless, in the interwar period ex-servicemen did not become a prominent collective political actor. This was chiefly due to the fact that the majority of them were re-integrated within society with some measure of success. Specifically, the state prevented them from radicalizing, by preserving its monopoly of violence, providing material rewards for the majority of the servicemen and discharging the latter only in 1920, once the country had already overcome some of its wartime political and social dislocations.<sup>11</sup>

However, various ex-servicemen from the victorious army did pursue political aims in this era: they focused chiefly on improving welfare provisions for former

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<sup>7</sup> HEPPNER AND GRÄF 2014: 4.

<sup>8</sup> WINTER 2010: 249.

<sup>9</sup> HEPPNER AND GRÄF 2014: 16.

<sup>10</sup> IORDACHI AND SCIARRINO 2017: 89.

<sup>11</sup> IORDACHI AND SCIARRINO 2017: 90-100.

soldiers; promoting national cohesion, mainly through patriotic education; finally, helping preserve, through various diplomatic initiatives, the country's new borders.<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that, while the relationships between the ex-servicemen's associations were troubled by organizational rivalries, it appears these fissures never escalated into ideological conflicts. Rather, these associations were bound by common patriotic ideals. Importantly, the representatives of the reserve officers agreed among themselves that they shared a common duty, to foster nationalism and class solidarity.<sup>13</sup>

To reach their aims, the leaders of the Romanian veterans' associations mobilized also at the transnational level. During the 1920s, their main strategy consisted in taking part in the activities of FIDAC. This organization had been founded by French ex-combatants, with a view to preserve the ties of solidarity which had developed between the Allied fighters during the war. To pursue this aim, FIDAC accepted ex-servicemen associations from former Entente countries. Another initial aim was helping former Allied combatants lobby their governments to receive benefits. Finally, by 1923 the Federation had openly committed to preserving continental peace.<sup>14</sup> It should be noticed that the Federation promoted a conditional form of pacifism, one in which the value of peace was rigidly subordinated to the aim of preserving the continental institutional and territorial *status quo*. For many Federation activists, upholding peace entailed preserving the political primacy of former Allied countries, while few concessions could be made to former enemies, still viewed as potential harbingers of destruction. Consequently, it was widely accepted within the Federation that European stability was strictly intertwined with the preservation of the peace treaties. While they wished to reconcile with their former enemies, FIDAC activists were firmly opposed to any alteration of the treaties, to the extent that they stated their readiness to fight, again, against any country defying these agreements.<sup>15</sup>

Romanian veterans' associations increasingly cooperated with FIDAC, taking part in its gatherings and other initiatives. This cooperation was made possible by two circumstances. First of all, the Romanian activists were no strangers to FIDAC's priority of protecting the peace treaties especially as their country had been conspicuously rewarded by the post-war settlements, in terms of territorial gains. In the words of one reserve officer, Romanian veterans were meant to play within FIDAC the role of "soldiers of peace."<sup>16</sup> They were committed to upholding the treaties, through tireless activism. When in 1926 Colonel Fred Abbott, the

<sup>12</sup> See *Fidac: Bulletin of the Allied Legions*, April 1928.

<sup>13</sup> *Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva: Buletinul - Secția Ilfov*, July-August 1926.

<sup>14</sup> ANASTASIU 1925: 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> DAVIES 2013: 199-203.

<sup>16</sup> *Opinia*, September 14, 1937.

chairman of FIDAC's propaganda committee, visited his Romanian comrades in Bucharest, one of the leaders of the local reserve officers, Victor Cadere, greeted him with the following pledge.

*Although we seek nothing but peace in our international relations, if we are provoked we will be ready to defend ourselves, and we confide in the triumph of our just cause, because the sacred and indestructible ties between the former Allied fighters still exist thanks to FIDAC (I)n keeping with the unanimous pledge of the Entente countries we make the solemn promise of – brotherly – comradeship of arms to those, among the Allies, who should fall victim to unjustified aggression.<sup>17</sup>*

Second, the Romanian state viewed its veterans' participation in FIDAC as an opportunity to further consolidate itself, thereby supporting their endeavours. After the peace conferences, Romania became embroiled in ongoing diplomatic disputes with Hungary, the Soviet Union and Bulgaria, concerning control over its annexed territories. Consequently, it joined regional political alliances and strengthened its military ties to France.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, it sought to legitimize its annexations through propaganda activities in the former Entente countries.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, in 1921 the Averescu government supported Romanian FIDAC activists in disseminating propaganda towards former Entente countries.<sup>20</sup> These ex-combatants aimed at persuading other Federation members that Romania was a crucial bulwark against revisionism and communism in central and south-eastern Europe. For the whole interwar period, the governments – which shared a wish to preserve the Versailles system, independently from their political leanings<sup>21</sup> – aided the ex-servicemen's cooperation with the Federation, for instance by paying travel fares for the veterans attending FIDAC congresses.<sup>22</sup>

During the 1920s, various Romanian associations joined the Federation. By 1927, four associations had received formal membership: as a result, out of 157,000 associated ex-servicemen and war widows, 62,000 militated in FIDAC.<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, by the end of the decade, all the country's main associations of able-bodied

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<sup>17</sup> *Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva: Buletinul - Secția Bihor*, Number 1, 1926

<sup>18</sup> STEINER 2005: 90-98, 267, 269, 297.

<sup>19</sup> NAGY 2017: 138-140.

<sup>20</sup> Report sent by the Minister of War to the Prime Minister, dated November 6, 1921, in box 14 of the fund "Congrese și Conferințe Internaționale," (CCI), at the Arhiva Diplomatică Ministerului Afacerilor Externe (ADMAE), Bucharest.

<sup>21</sup> HITCHINS 1994: 427.

<sup>22</sup> Letter sent by the central committee of the Union of Reserve Officers (Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva; UOR) to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated August 5, 1926, in box 14, CCI, AD-MAE.

<sup>23</sup> *Fidac*, March 1927.

former fighters were enrolled in the Federation. It should also be noticed that FIDAC encouraged the creation of new organizations in Romania. When, in 1925, the FIDAC Women's Auxiliary was instituted, Romania created its own branch.<sup>24</sup> This branch grouped various women's associations: as the state had already taken important steps towards assisting war invalids and orphans, the auxiliaries focused mainly on educating youth to patriotism and pacifism.<sup>25</sup> In 1927, the Romanian Legion (*Legiunea Romana*) was founded,<sup>26</sup> after its promoters were encouraged by FIDAC.<sup>27</sup> It was this country's first federation of veterans' associations, meant to group all ex-servicemen on the model of the American and British Legions.<sup>28</sup> While it failed in achieving its aim, the Legion nevertheless worked as an umbrella organization for smaller associations.

It should be noticed that reserve officers, associated mainly with the Union of Reserve Officers (*Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva*; UOR), were especially active within the Federation. Their commitment stemmed from the fact that the Federation provided them with opportunities for pursuing their ideals. Additionally, Romanian governments encouraged the officers' participation in FIDAC by granting them economic benefits.<sup>29</sup> This was an important incentive, as long after the war, UOR leaders believed that their country had compensated other categories of ex-combatants at the expense of the reserve officers.<sup>30</sup> Aside from helping mediate between FIDAC and the Romanian associations, two UOR members became quite relevant for the institutional consolidation of the Federation. The first was Pierre Ciolan, who, as the Romanian consul in Paris, was in an ideal position, as FIDAC's head office was in the same city. He served as FIDAC vice president between 1925 and 1936, in addition to working in various of its committees. The second was Victor Cadere. A talented diplomat, politician and academic, he helped organize the committees of various Federation congresses. He also helped shape the Federation's general policies, compelling it to strengthen its ties to the League of Nations and proposing that its president visit each year a member nation.<sup>31</sup> The leader of the Romanian Women's Auxiliary, Princess Alexandrina Cantacuzino, was also quite

<sup>24</sup> *Fidac*, June 1930.

<sup>25</sup> *Fidac*, September 1928.

<sup>26</sup> *Fidac*, April 1928.

<sup>27</sup> *Bulletin: Fédération Interalliée des Anciens Combattants*, August 1925.

<sup>28</sup> *Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva: Buletinul - Secția Bihor*, March 1927.

<sup>29</sup> Minutes of the UOR internal meeting of 1 November 1925, in folder 11 of the fund "Uniunea Ofițerilor de Rezerva și în Retragere" (UORR), at the Arhivele Naționale ale României (ANR), Bucharest, 183.

<sup>30</sup> Letter by the UOR president to the president of the National Union of Former Fighters (*Uniunea Națională A foștilor Luptători*; UNAL), dated 13 March 1925, in folder 11, UORR, ANR, 18.

<sup>31</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the organizing committee for the 1924 FIDAC congress, taking place on 19 June 1924, in folder 10, UORR, ANR, 169.

influential. A prominent leader of various international women's organizations,<sup>32</sup> she headed the general FIDAC auxiliary organization in 1929-1930. Additionally, she promoted an international exchange program for war orphans, aiming to educate European youth to pacifism, which was eventually adopted at the Federation's congress of 1929.<sup>33</sup>

During this decade, FIDAC annual congresses provided the main opportunities for the Romanian associations to pursue their goals. Four among them proved especially relevant. At the 1924 congress, held in London, the Romanian delegation secured a motion which proposed the legal recognition of the Soviet Union's existence, but only over the territories it controlled at the time. This statement was clearly meant to legitimize Romanian control over Bessarabia, in the face of concomitant Soviet claims. The motion was acclaimed by the assembly, after the Romanian delegates overcame the perplexities of the Yugoslav and Czechoslovak representatives. The delegation also proposed, together with its British, Yugoslav and Czechoslovak counterparts, a motion opposing any territorial claim unsanctioned by the peace treaties.<sup>34</sup> Finally, it raised approval for a motion asking FIDAC to open a branch at the League of Nations, in the hope of keeping the American Legion – whose government had withdrawn from the League – well disposed towards the latter.<sup>35</sup>

At the Rome congress of 1925, the Romanian delegation supported a motion asking all European states to assist mutilated and disabled veterans, in addition to war orphans.<sup>36</sup> This congress was an opportunity for Romanian ex-servicemen to strengthen ties with their Yugoslav and Czechoslovak counterparts.<sup>37</sup> Notably, the Romanians were cordial to their Italian hosts, thereby acquiescing to the recent fascistization of the local ex-servicemen's community. Specifically, earlier in the year, Mussolini had replaced the leaders of the main veterans' association, after they had tried to preserve the latter's autonomy from the Fascist party. During the congress, the leader of the Romanian delegation, General Alexe Anastasiu, did not touch upon this matter, following the advice previously given to him by a vice president of FIDAC, lieutenant Aurel Ianculescu: "*(The) conflicts between the Italian ex-combatants and the Fascists should not be our concern (The new leaders of the Italian veterans) have shown a special concern for Romania and their sympathy cannot but please us.*"<sup>38</sup> Clearly, Mussolini's authoritarianism was

<sup>32</sup> NEGRU 2014: 103-104.

<sup>33</sup> Report on the FIDAC congress of 1929, likely from 1929, folder 16, UORR, ANR, 381.

<sup>34</sup> Minutes of the 1924 FIDAC congress, likely from 1924, in box 14, CCI, ADMAE.

<sup>35</sup> Report sent by Victor Cadere to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated 5 October 1924, in box 14, CCI, ADMAE.

<sup>36</sup> Report on the 1925 FIDAC congress, likely from 1925, in folder 1, UORR, ANR, 243-244.

<sup>37</sup> Minutes of the UOR internal meeting of 2 October 1925, in folder 10, UORR, ANR, 404.

<sup>38</sup> Letter by Ianculescu to UOR president, dated 28 April 1925, in folder 10, UORR, ANR, 179.

tolerable, for the Romanian FIDAC activists, as long as the Fascist dictator was not openly challenging the Versailles system.

In 1926, Romanian ex-combatants took part in the Warsaw congress, securing a motion against the incursions carried out by Bulgarian paramilitaries in the border areas of Romania and Yugoslavia. Moreover, the delegates took a firm stance against the possibility of treaty revision. Cadere, speaking on behalf of the commission for external affairs, warned against concessions to German revisionist claims, claiming this country was secretly preparing for war.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, the September 1928 congress of Bucharest was, first and foremost, an ambitious display of “cultural diplomacy”<sup>40</sup> on behalf of Romanian veterans, aimed at FIDAC. In doing so, the ex-servicemen hosting the gathering were hoping to secure once again diplomatic support for their nation. As a matter of fact, tensions between Romania and Hungary had recently flared, due to the increasing support for Hungarian proposals for territorial revisionism, on behalf of influential sectors of the British press.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, during the congress, Romanian veterans strove to present their guests with the image of a strong, just and united country, to better argue for its strategic importance: the foreign delegates were taken to visit the tomb of the unknown soldier and social and educational institutions in Bucharest. They were also invited to other areas in the country, such as the town of Braşov, the military cemetery of Sinaia and the laying site of the recently deceased King Ferdinand I, Curtea de Argeş.<sup>42</sup> The country’s political authorities provided further authoritativeness to this event, as the delegates were saluted on the opening day by acting prime minister Ion Duca.<sup>43</sup>

With regard to the work of the congress, the Romanian representatives reaffirmed their commitment to peace: Cadere and Ciolan helped approve a motion endorsing the recent Kellogg-Briand Pact, which condemned the use of war as an instrument of foreign policy, with the exception of conflicts waged to defend the peace treaties.<sup>44</sup> At the congress, Romanian veterans also successfully tackled other priorities of theirs, such as welfare and national pedagogy. They solicited FIDAC to pass a resolution promoting the creation of cheap dwellings for ex-combatants.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, princess Cantacuzino secured the first step in her future program for exchanges between war orphans, obtaining the approval for her

<sup>39</sup> Report on the FIDAC congress of 1926, likely from 1926, in box 14, CCI, ADMAE.

<sup>40</sup> I consider ‘cultural diplomacy’ as the pursuit of “*foreign policy goals with the use of cultural instruments*”, see János Hankiss, quoted in: NAGY 2017: 2.

<sup>41</sup> NAGY 2017: 60-62.

<sup>42</sup> *Revista Foştilor Combatanţi Români*, September 1928

<sup>43</sup> *Fidac*, September 1928

<sup>44</sup> STEINER 2005: 573.

<sup>45</sup> *Fidac*, October 1928.



proposal that orphans be supported in visiting the French tomb of the unknown soldier in Paris.<sup>46</sup> The congress achieved its aims, especially with regard to confirming Romania's status as a prominent defender of order in central and south-eastern Europe. Soon after it ended, the Federation president Achille Reisdorff promised Romania FIDAC's support in countering revisionist propaganda. He also stated that the congress had strengthened feelings of camaraderie among the Federation's members.<sup>47</sup>

It should be noticed that Romanian veterans developed contacts with the Allied ex-servicemen through other venues, apart from the FIDAC congresses. To foster camaraderie, Romanian former fighters visited ex-servicemen from other victor countries, in addition to inviting foreign comrades to Romania. These exchanges took place mainly with countries which had shared combat operations with the Romanian kingdom, during the Great War, or later became its regional allies: the Little Entente partners, in addition to Poland and France. For instance, in 1926 French reserve officers visited Bucharest.<sup>48</sup> In the same year, UOR delegates attended the congress of the Czechoslovak reserve officers,<sup>49</sup> in addition to visiting the Polish ones.<sup>50</sup> Exchanges with other communities also helped Romanian veterans imitate foreign practices, which they applied to their national context. For instance, they adapted from the British Legion the idea of raising funds for assistance by selling remembrance poppies.<sup>51</sup>

Ultimately, throughout the 1920s, the relationship between the main Romanian associations of ex-servicemen and FIDAC was a close one, benefitting, to some degree, all parties involved. As a matter of fact, prominent veterans extolled the Federation as a useful ally for the Romanian nation-state.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, during this decade Romanian servicemen, except for delegates of mutilated and disabled veterans, appear not to have been involved with the other major transnational ex-servicemen's organization, CIAMAC.<sup>53</sup> This can be put down to the fact that CIAMAC, prioritizing the aim of reconciling Entente and defeated veterans, went in some occasions close to adopting an appeasing stance towards

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<sup>46</sup> *Fidac*, November 1928.

<sup>47</sup> Letter sent by the FIDAC president to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated 11 October 1928, in box 14, CCI, ADMAE.

<sup>48</sup> Untitled Romanian newspaper cutting, likely from 1926, in folder 15, UORR, ANR, 257.

<sup>49</sup> Letter by the UOR delegation to the president of the Czechoslovak reserve officers, likely from 1926, in folder 1, UORR, ANR, 415.

<sup>50</sup> *Buletinul Uniunii Ofițerilor de Rezerva și in Retragere*, November-December 1926.

<sup>51</sup> Report on UOR activities, in folder 1, likely from 1927, UORR, ANR, 447.

<sup>52</sup> BUFNEA 1933: 9-11.

<sup>53</sup> See Ciamac: Bulletin de la Conférence Internationale des Associations des Mutilés de Guerre et Anciens Combattants, August-September 1929.

the latter.<sup>54</sup> This orientation, in all likeness, went against the wishes of the Romanian veterans' leaders.

*1930-1939: Cooperating with CIAMAC, Standing by FIDAC*

During the following decade, the national agenda of Romanian veterans remained similar to the one of the 1920s. Nevertheless, a gradual authoritarian turn in Romania's political life, in addition to the strengthening of revisionist trends in Europe, impressed additional duties upon the local ex-servicemen, while also prompting them to adopt new strategies. These developments considerably influenced the transnational activism of the ex-combatants' leaders.

First of all, after his crowning in 1930, King Carol II gradually took on a hegemonic role in Romanian politics, frequently appointing new ministerial cabinets, establishing new institutions, aimed at organizing public life, and developing a cult of personality. In doing so, he aimed to implement an authoritarian design, which culminated in his decision to establish a personal dictatorship, in February 1938.<sup>55</sup> Many veterans acquiesced to Carol's policies, possibly due to their dissatisfaction with the mainstream political parties. After all, during the 1930s the parliamentary system underwent a gradual loss of popularity, among various ex-combatants. One of their main grievances with the established parties was the fact that, in the wake of the Great Depression they had curtailed the state's benefit program for veterans.<sup>56</sup> The grievances of these former fighters in all likeliness strengthened their support for Carol, who promised to make Romania a more prosperous nation. As the king also swore to improve the country's military defences,<sup>57</sup> he undoubtedly gained the support of many reserve officers, who were constantly concerned with defending Romania from its revisionist neighbours.<sup>58</sup>

Out of their support for the king, the veterans' leaders took up the task of upholding Carol's image within FIDAC. Specifically, they rationalized Carol's policies to their foreign comrades. For instance, in April 1931 the king reserved for himself the right to dismiss the government, appointing a new cabinet, headed by the nationalist Nicolae Iorga, which displayed noticeable authoritarian undertones.<sup>59</sup> An article appeared soon after in the Federation's bulletin, claiming that Iorga's cabinet was ruling in compliance with the kingdom's consti-

<sup>54</sup> EICHENBERG 2011: 297.

<sup>55</sup> IORDACHI 2014: 241-246.

<sup>56</sup> IORDACHI AND SCIARRINO 2017: 102-108.

<sup>57</sup> BUCUR 2010: 113.

<sup>58</sup> *Buletinul Uniunii Ofițerilor de Rezerva și in Retragere*, February 1934

<sup>59</sup> KÜHRER-WIELACH 2016: 589-590.

tution and parliament.<sup>60</sup> In the following years, the Romanian FIDAC activists promoted the publication of another article by the same author, portraying the king as a self-abnegating servant of his people.<sup>61</sup> Moreover, the leaders of the ex-servicemen disseminated within the Federation an idealized image of Carol. They presented the king as a just and capable ruler, emphasizing his attempts to increase Romania's fighting power.<sup>62</sup>

Aside from Carol's co-optation of various veterans, other events affected the transnational activism of Romanian ex-servicemen. As mentioned above, at the start of the decade, the state reduced its benefits program for the ex-combatants. This policy in all likelihood was the main factor which encouraged invalid and disabled former fighters to work more closely with CIAMAC. By 1933 two associations for disabled veterans had joined this organization.<sup>63</sup> The Romanian CIAMAC activists focused on lobbying the state to extend war pensions to additional categories of war invalids.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, the Romanian delegation to CIAMAC included also men who had fought in the Habsburg army, during the Great War.

It should nevertheless be pointed out that the Romanian veterans' involvement with the Conference remained limited. It appears these activists did not accept CIAMAC's emphasis on reconciliation with former enemies, for instance attempting to discourage the Habsburg army veterans in the Romanian delegations from openly articulating, within this forum, their specific grievances. Moreover, the Romanian CIAMAC activists' official point of view on the issue of continental disarmament was similar to that of their FIDAC counterparts: the pursuit of demilitarization should in no way lead to the revision of the peace treaties.<sup>65</sup> Finally when, in 1935, a CIAMAC gathering was held in Bucharest, it appears the local organizers deliberately kept the event a discreet affair, as they avoided involving the city's inhabitants in the proceedings.<sup>66</sup>

As a matter of fact, FIDAC remained the main transnational forum through which the leaders of the veterans pursued their aims. First of all, some among them played an important institutional role in the Federation, just as they had in the previous decade. Notably, Cadere was unanimously elected president in 1933, holding this position also in 1934. Additionally, Cantacuzino was re-elected

<sup>60</sup> *Fidac*, July 1931.

<sup>61</sup> Report on the activities of FIDAC's Romanian national branch, for 1932-1933, likely from 1933, in folder 23, UORR, ANR, 52.

<sup>62</sup> See, for instance, *Fidac*, June 1934.

<sup>63</sup> *Ciamac*, October-November 1933.

<sup>64</sup> Report by the Romanian CIAMAC delegation to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated 28 July 1930, in box 27, CCI, ADMAE.

<sup>65</sup> Report by the Romanian CIAMAC delegation to the Prime Minister, dated 10 August 1931, in box 27, CCI, ADMAE.

<sup>66</sup> *Adevarul*, May 15, 1935.

president of the auxiliary organization in 1938-1939.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, the Romanian member associations of the Federation kept attending its congresses and studying the activities of member organizations from other countries. As a matter of fact, it appears UOR took the Belgian veterans' federation as a model for the Romanian federation they helped create in 1932.<sup>68</sup> Finally, during this decade other Romanian associations joined FIDAC. In 1937, the leader of a new organization of officers, Nicolas Hamat, became FIDAC vice president,<sup>69</sup> while in 1939 three additional organizations were admitted as Federation members.<sup>70</sup>

Within FIDAC, these activists attempted to consolidate their achievements from the previous decade. Their main priority was opposing territorial revisionism, as well as any other policy which might favour it. For instance, in the early 1930s, Romanian FIDAC activists took a moderate approach to the issue of disarmament, like their co-nationals within CIAMAC. Consequently, they supported the joint resolution which FIDAC and CIAMAC presented at the World Disarmament Conference of Geneva: this resolution was quite limited in its aims, stressing the need to pursue security together with disarmament, in addition to respecting the peace treaties.<sup>71</sup>

As in the 1920s, Romanian ex-servicemen preserved ties of solidarity with other foreign veterans' associations, through mutual visits. Noticeably, these exchanges kept taking place in the mid-to late 1930s, at a time when the diplomatic and military alliances between the former Entente countries were deteriorating.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, just like their Yugoslav counterparts,<sup>73</sup> the Romanian FIDAC activists remained invested in their transnational ties of solidarity, viewing them as a relevant source of legitimation for the Romanian kingdom's post-war borders. In 1931, a Romanian delegation attended the congress of the Little Entente of War Volunteers in Belgrade.<sup>74</sup> In 1933, a similar congress took place in Cluj, Bucharest and Constanța: among the guests were Little Entente volunteers, including one of the leaders of the Yugoslav veterans' movement, the war hero Lujo Lovrić, in addition to a delegation from Poland.<sup>75</sup> In 1935, UOR delegates visited the Yugo-

<sup>67</sup> *Fidac*, December 1938.

<sup>68</sup> The Belgian National Federation of Former Fighters (*Fédération National des Anciens Combattants*) sent UOR a copy of its federal statute, as requested to it by the latter. See the letter sent by the federal secretary and president of the National Federation of Former Fighters to UOR, dated 8 March 1932, in folder 23, UORR, ANR, 42.

<sup>69</sup> *Capitala*, October 20, 1937.

<sup>70</sup> *Fidac*, November 1939.

<sup>71</sup> Report on the activities of FIDAC's Romanian national branch, for 1932-1933, likely from 1933, 51-52.

<sup>72</sup> WANDY CZ 1981: 563.

<sup>73</sup> NEWMAN 2015: 222-223.

<sup>74</sup> NEWMAN 2015: 223.

<sup>75</sup> *Gazeta Ilustrată*, August 1933.

slav reserve officers,<sup>76</sup> while a representative of the latter later attended a UOR congress.<sup>77</sup> In 1937, Cadere and other officers visited Yugoslavia,<sup>78</sup> while Polish officers came to Romania.<sup>79</sup> The Romanian Women's Auxiliary also cemented the connections it had created during the previous decade. In 1935, a delegation which included various auxiliaries and youths was invited to Bucharest by Cantacuzino, visiting one of the educational structures of the Romanian branch, the "Home of Women" (*Casa Femeii*).<sup>80</sup>

In the middle-to late 1930s, the political ascendancy of Nazi Germany, in addition to the growing unwillingness of France and Great Britain to support collective security in Central Europe,<sup>81</sup> caused a shift in the policies of FIDAC. The Federation became open to the possibility of fostering ties of friendship with veterans from the defeated countries, in a more conciliatory fashion than in the past. Its members hence accepted to enter another transnational organization of veterans, the International Permanent Commission (*Comité International Permanent*; CIP) (1936-1939). This commission had been devised by German and Italian ex-combatants with the ostensible purpose of conciliating the needs of victor and defeated nations.<sup>82</sup> Romanian activists were affected by the Federation's change of attitude. Hence, Hamat and Virgil Serdaru, the president of the National Union of Former Fighters (*Uniunea Națională A foștilor Luptători*; UNAL) joined the CIP.<sup>83</sup> In 1937, Serdaru also travelled to Rome, to meet the leaders of the Italian veterans. During this visit, he highlighted the long-standing links between Romania and Italy, by bowing in front of the city's statue of the Unknown Soldier.<sup>84</sup>

Ultimately, FIDAC's conciliatory tactic did not achieve the appeasement it sought. By 1938, it had become clear to the Federation members that the main aim of the CIP was to legitimize German and Italian expansionist claims.<sup>85</sup> Acknowledging this state of affairs, Romanian FIDAC activists attempted to honour their commitment to defending the peace treaties. This renewed commitment resulted in the 1938 FIDAC congress of Bucharest, the same week the Munich Agreement was signed. Here, Romanian ex-servicemen attempted to revitalize

<sup>76</sup> *Fidac*, June 1935.

<sup>77</sup> *Buletinul Uniunii Ofițerilor de Rezerva și in Retrageră*, August 1935.

<sup>78</sup> *Universul*, June 9, 1937.

<sup>79</sup> *Curentul*, August 29, 1937.

<sup>80</sup> *Fidac*, June 1935.

<sup>81</sup> STEINER 2011: 160, 262.

<sup>82</sup> ALCALDE 2017: 253-257.

<sup>83</sup> *Fidac*, June 1939.

<sup>84</sup> Report sent by the Romanian military attaché in Rome to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, dated 19 August 1937, in the volume 64 ("1937-Mai 1938"), category "Italia," in the fund "71/1920-1944," ADMAE, 170-172.

<sup>85</sup> ALCALDE 2017: 267.

FIDAC's guiding principle, the notion that the former Allied block could preserve order in Europe, at a time when, as a matter of fact, France and Britain were still attempting to appease the revisionist powers.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, the Romanian veterans' course of action appears to have been broadly congruent with official Romanian diplomacy, as king Carol at the time was pursuing a course of "non-alignment", which entailed drawing closer to Nazi Germany, while at the same time still holding friendly relationships with Romania's traditional ally, France.<sup>87</sup> To be sure, there was a feeling of quiet dismay hanging over the congress. Hamat, inaugurating the event, recognized that FIDAC had underestimated Hitler's determination to dismantle the Versailles system. Nevertheless, the hosts strove to summon a spirit of determination. Cadere, presiding over the congress, attempted to reassure the delegates that, under the firm hand of Carol, who had become dictator at the start of the year, Romania was becoming a stronger country, implicitly stating that the Romanian kingdom would continue performing its role as a bulwark against revisionism. Moreover, the hosts, just like they had done ten years earlier, took their guests to visit various social and cultural institutions, in addition to historical landmarks. For instance, the delegates were shown the mausoleum of Marășesti, the site of Romania's fiercest battle during the Great War. Other activities included meeting the dictatorship's Prime Minister, Patriarch Miron Cristea, and observing the activities of the state youth organization, the "Sentinel of the Motherland" (*Straja Țării*).

The signing of the Munich Agreement, however, dashed any spirit of resistance the congress might have prompted in its participants. The FIDAC bulletin summed up thus the mood of disillusionment the settlement had caused to the delegates.

*From its Congress in Bucharest, the FIDAC sent urgent and imperative appeals to all of its associations to exert their utmost efforts on behalf of peace. There was a ready response and energetic action. As the sky darkened and war seemed inevitable, however, these same ex-servicemen, sadly yet determinedly, without hysteria or recrimination, prepared to defend their respective countries. Following the Munich agreement, they bowed to the decisions of their leaders.*<sup>88</sup>

The Romanian FIDAC activists were in all likeness led by the Munich Agreement to pursue some measure of diplomatic rapprochement with Germany. In June 1939, the CIP president, the Duke of Saxe-Coburg, visited Bucharest, where he was received by Hamat and Serdaru, in what was clearly an attempt at strengthening relations between Germany and Romania.<sup>89</sup> It was however a fruitless attempt, as

<sup>86</sup> STEINER 2011: 642.

<sup>87</sup> HAYNES 2000: 43-90.

<sup>88</sup> *Fidac*, December 1938.

<sup>89</sup> *Fidac*, June 1939.

around that time Hitler decided that preserving the Romanian nation-state in its current form was not a political priority.<sup>90</sup> As a matter of fact in 1940, following the start of the Second World War, the Romanian kingdom was stripped by Hungary, Bulgaria and the Soviet Union of its territorial gains from the Second Balkan War and the majority of those from the First World War. This debacle spelled the end of Carol's dictatorship, as he was forced to cede power to an officer, General Ion Antonescu. Carol soon after was forced by Antonescu to abdicate, thereby passing on his crown to his son, Mihai I, and fleeing the country. The General would go on to rule the country through dictatorship until 1944, first governing together with the fascist movement of the Legion of the Archangel Michael, later – after crushing his erstwhile allies – on his own.

1940 was also the year FIDAC ceased to be a prominent transnational forum. Nevertheless, the Romanian FIDAC activists proved capable of honouring the ties of solidarity which buttressed the Federation. After the Nazi invasion of Poland, they provided relief and assistance to those Polish comrades who sought refuge in Romania, later helping these refugees reach France.<sup>91</sup>

### *Conclusions*

Studying the transnational activism of the Romanian FIDAC and CIAMAC members helps draw some relevant observations concerning the patterns of veterans' political activism in interwar Europe. First of all, this case study highlights the usefulness of transnational analyses, for comprehensively assessing the dynamics and outcomes of the political mobilizations enacted by Great War ex-servicemen. As seen above, the organizational entanglements which came into being between the Romanian community of Entente veterans and FIDAC significantly affected the activities of both these subjects. Especially in the 1920s, the Romanian ex-servicemen benefitted from their relationship with the Federation, as this connection helped them consolidate the international standing of Greater Romania, strengthen patriotism within the country – as the nationalist pedagogy of the Romanian Women's Auxiliary drew organizational resources from its cooperation with the Federation – and promote social legislation and assistance. FIDAC also helped the Romanian community of veterans grow more cohesive, as it promoted, directly or indirectly, the federative projects which came about within this community. On the other hand, the Federation was influenced, in some of its policies, by the activism of the Romanian members. Specifically, it appears Cadere helped the Federation embrace the ideals of collective security which were rather popular within the political cultures of the successor states in central and south-eastern Europe, by

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<sup>90</sup> HITCHINS 1994: 445-450.

<sup>91</sup> *Fidac*, March 1940.

advocating closer cooperation between the Federation and the League of Nations. Moreover, Cantacuzino played an important role in the development of FIDAC's organizational structure, by promoting the Federation's exchange program for war orphans. Ultimately, this case study helps grasp the significant influence of transnational networks over the "national" activism of Great War ex-servicemen.

The analysis of the various activities – from lobbying to educating – undertaken by the Romanian former fighters, as a part of their engagements with FIDAC and CIAMAC, suggests that the majority of these veterans were not politically "brutalized" by their wartime experiences. In other words, the ultimately moderate nature of these undertakings helps argue against the notion that battlefield combats radicalized numerous servicemen into unshakeable supporters of political violence and authoritarianism. Rather, as suggested by the Romanian FIDAC activists' support for Carol's dictatorial policies, it was the specific political situation of the 1930s – first and foremost the increasingly volatile international context – which radicalized various ex-servicemen into accepting authoritarianism. As seen above, for many Romanian ex-servicemen the preservation of the international and national orders borne out of military victory was a paramount goal. For this reason, they condoned Mussolini's fascistization of the Italian ex-combatants and accepted Carol's authoritarian regime. When convinced that authoritarianism was the only effective measure to pursue this priority, they were capable of endorsing – albeit with differing degrees of support – dictatorial policies. This observation arguably helps make the case that the political radicalization of Great War veterans which took place in various countries across interwar Europe was prompted more by post-war political and social tensions than wartime experiences.

Finally, the Romanian case study provides insights into the assumptions underlying the pacifist ideals of the transnational FIDAC community. It appears Romanian veterans shared with many other Federation members a strong commitment to peace. As in the case of other communities of Entente fighters, however, this commitment did not rule out the use of defensive war, nor did it entail an unconditioned willingness to reconcile with wartime enemies. Therefore, it can be argued that the conditional pacifism of Romanian ex-servicemen was not unique, fitting instead within FIDAC's political culture. Ultimately, the interactions between Romanian veterans and other former Entente highlight the conditional nature of the Federation's pacifism, which was subordinated to the preservation of the continental status quo.



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## „Vojnici mira”: Transnacionalni aktivizam rumunjskih veterana Velikoga rata 1920. – 1939.

U članku se obrađuju ciljevi, dinamika i ishodi transnacionalne mobilizacije koju su u međuratnom razdoblju poduzeli rumunjski veterani Velikoga rata. Osobita pozornost posvećena je načinu na koji su se ovi nekadašnji ratnici mobilizirali izvan nacionalnih granica kako bi osigurali priznanje svoje zemlje, stekli ekonomske povlastice i ishodili domovinski odgoj za svoje sugrađane. Kako bi ova studija slučaja bila što temeljitija, analiza je usredotočena na ulogu koju su bivši borci igrali unutar međunarodnih foruma poznatih kao FIDAC (*Fédération Interalliée des Anciens Combattants*) i CIAMAC (*“Conférence Internationale des Associations des Mutilés de guerre et Anciens Combattants” instead of “Conférence Internationale des Mutilés et Anciens Combattants”*).

Istodobno istražujem načine na koje su lokalni i nacionalni čimbenici utjecali na transnacionalne aktivnosti ovih veterana. Moja analiza temelji se uglavnom na primarnim izvorima iz rumunjskih arhiva i knjižnica koji do sada nisu bili sustavno istraživani.

Na temelju uvida iz ove studije slučaja, donosim sljedeće doprinose recentnim akademskim raspravama koje se tiču političkog aktivizma veterana europskog Velikoga rata između 1918. i 1939. godine. Prije svega, smatram da su transnacionalni činitelji (tj. mreže udruga, uz ideološke i organizacijske principe i robe) uvelike oblikovali političke aktivnosti koje su izvodili bivši suborci. Drugo, isticanjem u konačnici skromnih ciljeva za koje su se zalagali rumunjski veterani, smatram da ratna iskustva nisu nužno radikalizirala političko vladanje europskih veterana, što je jedna od glavnih pretpostavki teorije brutalizacije Georga Mossa.

Konačno, ističem kako su veterani iz zemalja bivše Antante bili povezani zajedničkom kulturom pobjede pa su stoga među njihovim ciljevima prioritet imali očuvanje versajskog i trijanonskog sustava.

*Ključne riječi:* Prvi svjetski rat, ratni veterani, međuratno doba, pacifizam, FIDAC, CIAMAC, socijalna pomoć, diplomacija, fašizam.

*Keywords:* First World War, war veterans, interwar era, pacifism, FIDAC, CIAMAC, welfare, diplomacy, fascism, commemoration.

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Časopis izlazi jedanput godišnje / The Journal is published once a year

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Financijska potpora za tisak časopisa / The Journal is published with the support by  
Ministarstvo znanosti, obrazovanja i športa Republike Hrvatske

Časopis je indeksiran u sljedećim bazama / The Journal is indexed in the following databases:  
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*Lektura / Language editors*  
Marijana Ivić (hrvatski / Croatian)  
Dražen Nemet (engleski / English)

*Tisak / Printed by*  
Tiskara Zelina, Sv. Ivan Zelina

*Naklada / Issued*  
200 primjeraka / 200 copies

*Časopis je u digitalnom obliku dostupan na Portalu znanstvenih časopisa  
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