

THE HISTORY OF THE RED CROSS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The Red Cross Movement was established in Romania in 1876 under the aegis of the homonymous international society. Its working principles are: helping people in need, humanity, intervention in case of disasters and calamities, and respect for human rights. During the Hohenzollern regime in Romania, as well as after 1918 the movement started medical and social assistance programs, training courses focused on people's response to major events or AIDS prevention, as well as volunteer initiatives for blood donation. Its role becomes a salient one during the two world wars either through the military hospitals it establishes or as a result of its fund raising campaigns.*

Key words: *charitable movement, humanitarian involvement, volunteering, military hospitals.*

1. The Origins and History of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement

The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement are the result of the initiative undertaken by the Swiss businessman, Henry Dunant (1828-1910) in 1859 as a result of the bloodiest battle of the century that was carried in Solferino. Dunant's initiative drew the entire world's attention to the need to establish humanitarian organizations and to promote an international agreement on supporting the wounded and their assistants. Henry Dunant had come to Solferino to meet Napoleon on business purposes and thus witnessed the horrible images still present after the battle. The young Genovese was deeply impressed by the humanitarian disaster resulting from the clash between the belligerents. Consequently, he gathered people in the neighboring city and for three days he incessantly took care of the wounded. His motto "Siamo tutti fratelli" (we are all brothers) opened the hearts of the volunteers who tended to the needs of all those in distress regardless of whether they were enemies or compatriots.

Even though Henry Dunant returned to Switzerland, he remained preoccupied with the nightmare he had witnessed in Solferino. Most likely, in order to remove the images from his memory he wrote a book called "A Memory of Solferino" which he published at his own expense in November 1862. Its main goal was to present the cruel reality of war to the whole world. Therefore, he sent the book to all ruling families of Europe, as well as to the military and political leaders involved in philanthropic actions, and to his friends. The main ideas developed by the latter proved of vital importance and concerned. The following

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establishment of a volunteer based humanitarian society in every country with the goal of tending the wounded during war time.

“A Memory of Solferino” was highly influential. In less than a year, as a result of its proposals, a worldwide organization was founded. In this respect, Dunant had the merit of having convinced the states to translate and acknowledge war practices via formal codes. At the time of Dunant’s initiative, there was also the Society for Public Welfare run by Gustave Moynier in Geneva. The latter was impressed by “A Memory of Solferino” and invited Dunant to come and talk about his book to the other members of this organization. The meeting resulted in establishing a five member commission consisting of Dunant, Moynier, General Guillaume Henri Dufour, dr. Louis Appia and dr. Theodore Maunoir. The commission first met on February 17, 1863 and entitled itself “The International Committee for Tending the Wounded”. In 1876 it would become the International Committee of the Red Cross. In the months to follow the aforementioned meeting and the establishment of the Committee: five members got highly involved in pursuing the latter’s goals. Consequently, an international conference gathering experts from 16 countries was organized in Geneva in October 1863.

During the event, the emblem of the Red Cross movement was adopted: a red cross against white background (namely, the reverse of the Swiss flag) with the purpose of distinguishing and hence protecting volunteers providing their support to the wounded. That was actually the birth of the Red Cross Movement.

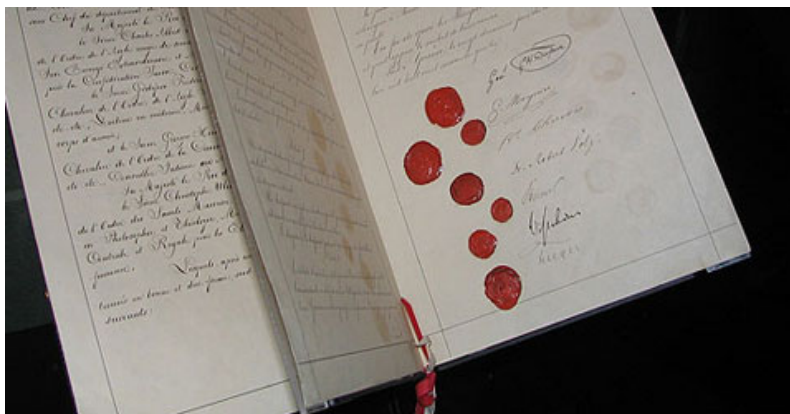


Fig. 1. *Photo of the legal document establishing the Red Cross Movement*

One of Dunant’s guiding ideas from his book came to life at the end of the International Conference of 1863, namely the establishment of volunteer based societies in every country. The first to come to life in this respect were the ones in Wurtemberg, the Grand Duchy of Oldenburg, Belgium and Prussia. It was followed afterwards by the movements from Denmark, France, Italy, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, Spain, Hamburg and Hesse. At the time they were called “national committees” or “relief organizations” and it was only later that they became known as the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

At the end of WWI, large areas from Europe were ruled by chaos: economy had been destroyed, population decimated by epidemics, and a great number of refugees and stateless people were looking for a place of their own on the continent. The war clearly proved the need for a tight cooperation among the Red Cross Movements which, as a

result of their efforts for war prisoners and combatants during the war, had managed to gather millions of volunteers and to bring together a large pool of experts. Henry P. Davidson, the president of the American Red Cross Committee for War suggested during a medical international conference organized in Cannes, France in April 1919 “the federalization of the domestic Red Cross Movements and their transformation into an organization similar to the League of Nations in order to permanently conduct a medical crusade meant to improve health, prevent diseases and comfort suffering”.

The International Federation of the Red Cross was formally founded in Paris by the Red Cross Movements from France, Great Britain, Italy, Japan and the USA on May 5th 1919. Its main goal was to improve the health of the people in the countries that most suffered during the four years of war. Moreover, it aimed at “consolidating and integrating the health related initiatives of the existing Red Cross Movements and to promote the creation of a new movement”. An important role of the Federation is to offer and coordinate the support granted to the victims of natural disasters and epidemics. As of 1939 its permanent headquarters has been in Geneva. The name of “International Federation of the Red Cross” became “The International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent” in 1991.

2. The History of the Red Cross in Romania

2.1. Its Establishment and Activity until 1941

As a result of Romania signing the Geneva Convention on November 30th 1874, the Romanian Red Cross Movement is founded on July 4th 1876 and headquartered on the current building of the Coltea hospital from Bucharest. The International Red Cross Committee acknowledges it the very first year on the 23rd of July, which was one of the prerequisites for it to run its activities. Its first most important mission was conducted on July 20th 1876 when an ambulance with young volunteers was sent to help the wounded of the Serbian-Turkish war. Between 1877-1878, during the Independence War the Red Cross Movement collects funds to support its operations. Moreover, it establishes sanitary groups, organizes courses in bandaging and stanching, allocates ambulances to troops sent at war and provides auxiliary sanitary personnel for the ambulance trains.

During WWI -1916-1918- women of various social backgrounds driven by humanitarian and patriotic feelings volunteer for the Romanian Red Cross Movement, visit hospitals, infirmaries, and canteens. Queen Mary herself, as the High Patron of the Romanian Red Cross Movement, visits hospitals, the triage areas and notices the devotion displayed by the Red Cross volunteers in taking care of the injured. After the occupation of Serbia by the Austro- Hungarian armed forces, the Serbian wounded people (12,000 people) are treated in Romania. The Red Cross facilitates the prisoners of the belligerent parties to send their letters and receive packages.

2.2. Results of the Romanian Red Cross during WWI

- a. Taking care of 150,000 wounded and sick people in its hospitals;
- b. Providing more than 10 million lunches to the military on the move, refugees and the needy;

- c. Providing food, clothing or money for 64,000 prisoners located in the territories occupied by central powers;
- d. Offering, shelter 30000 refugees shelter Shipping 350,000 letters and information to the prisoners and civilians working in its offices from Bucharest and Iasi;
- e. Distributing 58,000 food and clothing packages to the Romanian prisoners found in enemy camps;
- f. Allocating 20 million lei for covering its war expenses from the generous funds collected by prominent citizens like George Enescu, Grigoras Dinicu, Cella Delavrancea via subscription lists.

In **1919**: The National Red Cross Movement joins the recently founded Federation of National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. (As of 1991, the Federation changes its name into the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies). In 1922: the names of the Romanian women Belciuc Ioana, Danieliuc Elena, Georgescu Domnica, Gheorghiu Elena, Panaitescu Elena and Zaharescu Ecaterina, Red Cross volunteers who had heroically died while taking care of others, are inscribed onto the “Monument commending the devotion of the French and allied armed forces’ nurses who died between 1914-1919”. On May 19th 1922 the Youth’s Red Cross is founded. In 1923 the latter begins publishing the homonymous journal. The goal underlying the establishment of the Youth’s Red Cross is similar to the one supporting nowadays’ contest for health and first aid called “The Proficient Corpsmen”. Between the two World Wars, the Romanian Red Cross takes on the really difficult task of fighting contagious diseases like tuberculosis and malaria. Alongside the sanitary services it establishes dispensaries and summer camps.

In **1923** the “The Red Cross Week” event, which has reached its 79th iteration so far, is organized in Romania and in 1924 professor MD Ion Cantacuzino, member of the Romanian Red Cross board is nominated representative of the League of Red Cross Societies within the first League of Nations’ Permanent Hygiene Committee. On November 20th 1927 the headquarters of the Romanian Red Cross Society, a self-funded project, is inaugurated in Bucharest at the same address where it is to be found to this day: No 29. Biserica Amzei Street.

In **1930**: The Romanian Red Cross participates in the first Regional Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies from the Balkan states organized in Belgrade. This event will become a landmark and the former’s contribution to it has always been an important one.

Between **1937-1938**: the Red Cross builds a pavilion for children in Mangalia, as well as sanitary centers in Vaslui, Sighetu Marmatiei, Tighina, Orhei, Cetatea Alba. In March 1939 the Romanian Red Cross provides support to more than 5,000 hungry and naked Czech refugees, displaced by the occupation of Czechoslovakia and Sub-Carpathian Hungary. In September 1939, as a result of Poland’s invasion by the German and Soviet armed forces, around 100,000 Polish refugees are also helped. ‘

In **1940** the loss of parts of Romanian’s territory inclusiv for the Romanian Red Cross the loss of 27 of its subsidiaries and 132 subordinated units along with their assets, as well as 14,794 members and a capital of 17,196,386 lei, which was a lot of money for those times. The Romanian Red Cross set up canteens, sanitary points and infirmaries in all train stations that were transited by the refugees from the occupied Romanian territories.

2.2. The Romanian Red Cross' activity during WWII

In 1941 once Romania declared war, the Romanian Red Cross that was under the high patronage of Queen Elena aids the wounded, the sick, the refugees and the prisoners. Between 1941-1945: the Romanian Red Cross establishes 6 military hospitals, 16 hospitals within enclosed areas, 55 canteens in railway stations and 40 infirmaries. Thousands of letters and packages are shipped to the Yugoslav, Polish, French, English, Bulgarian, etc. prisoners located in Germany. Representatives of the Romanian Red Cross visit prisoner camps, provide a lot of support and request for their humanitarian treatment.

2.3. The Romanian Red Cross under the Communist Regime

The destiny of the Romanian Red Cross was influenced by the communist dictatorship. Until 1989, that is for almost half a century, the organization was under strict governmental control and that prevented it from fully accomplishing its noble and generous mission. Despite all difficulties, among which its annexation as a department within the Ministry of Health or the threat of disbanding it remained an entity that maintained its functions, usefulness and its fundamental credo of helping people in distress. In 1947-1948 With international support the Romania Red Cross provides important aids to the starving population from Moldova during the terrible famine of those years. In this respect, it distributed 460 tons of wheat, large quantities of sugar, medicine, rice, powder milk, clothing and shoes. The war orphans, widows and invalids receive social assistance. To this end, the organization publishes the "I.O.V.R. Leaflet" until August 1950.

In 1950 the "I.O.V.R Leaflet" becomes the journal titled "Ready for Sanitary Defense" (English for „Gata pentru apararea sanitara") and as of 1959 it is called "Health".

Between 1952 and 1953 the first sanitary groups of the Red Cross are established with the purpose of intervening in case of catastrophes, accidents, etc. They would prove their high usefulness during the 1953-1954 heavy snowfalls in Romania.

In 1956 the Romanian Red Cross sets up the first cinema caravan aimed at educating population from a sanitary point of view. In 1962, the first "Proficient Corpsmen" contest focused on how to give first aid was organized at the initiative of the Bacau territorial branch of the Red Cross. In the years to come, that would become one of the emblematic activities of the Romanian Red Cross.

Between 1970 and 1975 the Romanian Red Cross organizes its first ample campaigns targeting the people displaced by the catastrophic floods in Center and Western Romania. Large international aid is granted to the Romanian Red Cross via the Federation.

In 1976 the Romanian Red Cross celebrates a century since its establishment and in 1977 the Romanian Red Cross promptly intervenes to aid the victims of March 4 earthquake, as well as the military participating in the rescue operations. What is more, important international contributions were made through the Romanian Red Cross.

Between 1972 and 1978 the Romanian Red Cross was elected member of:

- the Governors' Council , the supreme debate forum of the Federation;
- the Federation Executive Board;
- the Committee on Finances;
- the Federation's Consultative Committee for Sisters.

Between **1978 and 1982** the Romanian Red Cross also filled the chair of vice-president of the Federation's Committee for Youth.

All of the above is thus a powerful acknowledgment of the remarkable role played by this organization within the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement.

2.4. The 1990s and afterwards

The 1990s: representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross and of the Federation arrive in Romania and support the complete reorganization of the Romanian Red Cross in full compliance with the organization's underlying principles. Thus, the Romanian Red Cross regains its autonomy and independence. The Federation launches a call for 50 million Swiss francs in order to support Romanian orphanages and places hosting crippled people. In its turn, the ICRC manages to set up standard surgical facilities in 150 hospitals in Romania.

The new statutes of the Romanian Red Cross valid for the next four years, as well as its new leadership were voted during the Extraordinary General Assembly of the Red Cross Society called for the 8th and 9th of November, 1990. The General Assembly approves the activity areas of the Romanian Red Cross as follows:

- a. Training for disaster crisis management and first aid;
- b. Social programs;
- c. training Red Cross voluntary sisters;
- d. HIV/AIDS prevention;
- e. Voluntary free of charge blood donations;
- f. Disseminating international humanitarian legislation;
- g. Youth;
- h. Operational autonomy.

In the spring of 1991 Romanian Red Cross' national campaign to protect war victims under the motto „Luminati intunericul!” (Romanian for: “Lit the darkness”) and in June 1991 the Romanian Red Cross organizes the first national symposium for applying International Humanitarian Law in Romania. In april 1992: the Center for Bone Marrow Treatment is inaugurated in Bucharest with the support of the Romanian Red Cross and the Federation and in January-March 1993 the Romanian Red Cross along with the support of the Federation organizes the first winter programs to assist the poor families from the counties of Suceava, Botosani, Brasov, Covasna.

In September 1993 a new iteration of the contest “The Proficient Corpsmen” is organized in a new formula and based on new regulations and in March 1995 the Romanian Red Cross offer humanitarian support to the people who had gone on hunger strike at the Romanian National Television.

August 22nd, 1995: the Romanian Red Cross is approved by the UN Committee in charge of supervising the embargo on Yugoslavia to provide support to the refugees who were on the territory of the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. The first shipment consisted of 20 tons of flour. Moreover, the aids provided by the Romanian government to the same end and including 800 million lei, food, tents, clothing, shoes, inflatable reservoirs for drinkable water were also shipped through she same organization.

December 20th, 1995: the Romanian Parliament passes the Law on the Romanian Red Cross Society no.139 / 1995 and the latter is endorsed by the Romanian president, Ion Iliescu, on December 29th, 1995.

March 28th 1996: as a result of the Law no.139/1995, The Extraordinary General Assembly of the Romanian Red Cross votes the New Statute of the organization.

November 1996: Upon the request of the Romanian Red Cross, its Brazilian counterpart provides mineral water, food and medical humanitarian aid to 17 salesmen in distress located in the Brazilian harbor of Belem.

December 1996: an important donation in clothing, shoes, linen, beds and food is made to 200 students coming from orphanages.

In March 20th, 1997 the Declaration of the 5th European Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is issued and underlines that: “the mission of the Red Cross and Red Crescent is to improve the life of the most vulnerable people. We believe that people are vulnerable when they are at risk and lack personal, family, community and public resources that could ensure the right level of welfare and health” and between 1990 and 1997 training courses are attended by 51,000 women, most of them of young age.

November 7th, 1997: the United Nations Program for development and the Romanian Red Cross sign a Memorandum on providing humanitarian relief to the Romanian victims of floods. As a result of that and with the Romanian government’s approval, material support is granted to the displaced people from the counties of Teleorman, Dambovita, Dolj, Caras-Severin and Bacau.

In February 1998 the first aid training courses for the flight personnel (namely pilots and flight attendants) of the Romanian air companies are initiated by the Red Cross and in May 1998 upon the recommendation of the World Health Organization and the US Center For Disease Control and Prevention, the Romanian Ministry of Health requests the Romanian Red Cross humanitarian aid to stop the German measles epidemics affecting 33,199 people and resulting in 13 deaths. That was Red Cross’ largest campaign against epidemics for the past 50 years – one of its kind for Central and Eastern Europe. Supported by the Federation, the Romanian Red Cross took responsibility for bringing the vaccines into the country and for mobilizing society to have target groups vaccinated: both children in schools, but also children from vulnerable groups outside the educational system.

Professor Nicolae Nicoară is reelected president of the Romanian Red Cross and in February 1999: for the first time after 1944 the Romanian Red Cross makes its expenditures public: 4,330,260,000 lei in donations made by Romanian people, companies, banks for the people displaced in the summer of 1998.

February 1998: The Romanian Red Cross asks people to help the victims of the Yugoslavian conflict. In March 1999: The Romanian Red Cross provides support to the refugees from Yugoslavia who had fled from conflict onto Romanian territory.

In May 8th 1999 the *MILLENNIUM* campaign begins in Romania. It aims at collecting funds for 2000 orphans and 1,526 volunteers contribute. The money collected from the population and companies amounted to 355,244,290 lei. The Romanian Red Cross added to that 150,000,000 lei and thus, on the 1st of June 1999 each of the 2000 children received a package with clothes, shoes and food that was worth approximately 250,000 lei.

In June-July 1999 new floods in the center and the south of Romania. Along with the authorities, the Romanian Red Cross sends aids totaling 800,000,000 lei.

In August 10th, 1999 as part of the *MILLENNIUM* campaign, the Romanian Red Cross organizes the symposium “Even wars have their limits” in order to celebrate 50 years from the first Geneva Convention signed on August 12, 1949. The event is attended by

representatives of the Romanian Red Cross, the Romanian Parliament, the Ministry of National Defense, the Ministry of Foreign affairs and the Romanian International Law Association.

On July, 4th 2001 – *the Romanian Red Cross celebrates 125 years of uninterrupted activity* and that is acknowledged by the Patriarch of the Romanian Orthodox Church, Teoctist, high representatives of public authorities and veterans of the organization.

September 2007 – the first fund raising for the elderly is organized and broadcast live by the Romanian Television during the show „Surprize, Surprize” (Romanian for “Surprises, surprises” and on May 19th 2008 – the Romanian Red Cross launches the humanitarian campaign „Apel pentru China” (Romanian for “Support China”), aimed at helping the victims of the devastating earthquake in China. In order to perform better during the World War I, the Romanian Red Cross merged with the Ladies Red Cross Society in Romania. During that period women belonging and patriotic feeling, worked as Red Cross volunteers in hospitals, nursing homes and canteens.

3. Conclusion

There are three major milestones in the history of the Red Cross Movement in Romania until 2017: the Independence War, WWI and WWII. During the Communist regime, its activity was shadowed by totalitarian policies. Nonetheless, after 1990, it managed to regain the role it had so well played before 1945.

The Red Cross Movement has been a hub for the important players of the time - popular and famous people or politicians directly involved in its events. For example, Queen Mary of Romania was the heart of the Movement before and especially during WWI and chose to act as a nurse in military hospitals; other important figures involved in the activities of the Movement were Alexandrina Cantacuzino, Zoe Romniceanu, Arethia Tătărescu and Princess Olga Mavrocordat. After 1990, a lot of famous people from cinema or artistic circles have been acting to the benefit of the Red Cross. What sustains and confers consistency and longevity to the Red Cross Movement are its principles: helping people, doing charity, and showing Christian mercy.

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