



The Little Entente of Women as Transnational Ethno-Nationalist Community

Spotlight on Romania

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ABSTRACT

The founding of the Little Entente of Women (LEW) in 1923 provided new opportunities for feminists from member and aspiring countries to work together toward common goals for women's rights in those states. As they forged transnational bridges and built friendships across borders, the feminists of the LEW articulated a vision of progress deeply rooted in ethno-nationalism and racialized rhetoric. In this article I reflect primarily on the verbal rhetoric and visual symbols used by representatives of these countries in the first two gatherings of the network. Their empathy seems to have extended predominantly to the ethnic majorities represented in the group. Even as they spoke for women in general as a category, many understood each other to be speaking on behalf of specific ethnic and racial groups. The narrowness of this vision undercut the effectiveness of the work the LEW undertook and the goals it aspired to achieve.

KEYWORDS: Alexandrina Cantacuzino, ethnic minority, feminism, Little Entente of Women, nationalism, Romania



The peace treaties after World War I represented a major shift not only in the map of Eastern Europe, but also in feminist political and social activism in the region. The founding of the Little Entente of Women (LEW) in 1923 provided new opportunities for feminists from member and aspiring countries to work together toward common goals for women's rights in those states. As they forged transnational bridges and built friendships across borders, the feminists of the LEW articulated a vision of progress deeply rooted in ethno-nationalism and racialized rhetoric. Their empathy seems to have extended predominantly to the ethnic majorities represented in the group. Even as they spoke for women in general as a category, many understood each other to be speaking on behalf of specific ethnic and racial groups. The narrowness of this vision



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In this article I reflect primarily on the verbal rhetoric and visual symbols used by representatives of these countries in the first two gatherings of the network in Bucharest (1923) and Belgrade (1924). I focus on how participants from member countries depicted what they viewed as points of similarity and contrast among their ethnic communities and countries, represented in terms of ethno-racialized ethnicity and respectively shared geographies (regional identities). The categories they set up rhetorically, and how they chose to render visible and invisible commonalities and differences, became discursive tools for generating a shared understanding of what the LEW represented: in each member country individually; as a regional network; and as a bloc within larger feminist networks, such as the International Women's Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) and the International Council of Women (ICW).

Speeches, interviews, press articles, and other published and archival materials linked to the participation of Romanian members in the LEW reveal both shifting vocabularies around common themes, as well as constant discursive elements. In the spirit of *histoire croisée*, I analyze these rhetorical strategies to highlight the dynamic role that the LEW played in the history of feminist activism in Romania, and conversely, how the participation of Romanian feminists shaped the discursive strategies and activities of the LEW.¹ While I place Alexandrina Cantacuzino at the center of this analysis, as her perspective was predominant in the public interventions of the Romanian delegations to the LEW, I situate her in dialogue with other Romanian participants, such as Ecaterina Cerchez, as well as participants from other countries in this network, such as Polish feminist Dr. Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka.

Many LEW activities were public performances of ideas and values embraced by the feminist participants. In fact, the history of the network can be described as a performance of feminism, since the immediate direct outcomes of its congresses were primarily forms of speech: nonbinding resolutions sent to international and national bodies, interviews in the press, exhibits of artefacts made by women, teas with representatives of the royal house or government, or musical performances. Few women's lives (other than the participants') were directly altered by these activities. And yet, in performing particular forms of female empowerment in public, members of the LEW provided a remarkable spectacle with the potential to mobilize others for the feminist causes they supported. The LEW, however, ultimately did not live up to many of its aspirations, especially with regard to securing voting rights for all women from the member countries. Its pacifist goals were also rendered problematic by the exclusionary ethno-nationalist rhetoric of some members.

The Context

Romania's nationalism before the founding of the LEW blended anti-imperial emancipatory sentiments, cast against the various powers that surrounded territories where Romanians lived, with specific animosities expressed toward the ethnic groups that dominated those territories.² The recognition of an independent Romanian state in

1881, ruled by a foreign king and surrounded by territories where many ethnic Romanians continued to live under regimes that also discriminated against this ethnic group, helped fuel irredentism and an exclusionary perspective on citizenship rights. Little trust developed between ethnic Romanians, as an oppressed minority, and the Hungarian, Austrian, or Russian elites and governments that dominated the political and economic landscape of Transylvania, the Banat, Bukovina, and Bessarabia. Inside the Romanian kingdom, where Orthodox Christian Romanians made up around 90 percent of the population, antisemitism was a mainstream political and cultural position.³

World War I found Romanian elites confounded with the reality of a German-born king on the throne, an English-born princess as the wife of the heir apparent, and a political establishment that sought to preserve their own economic privileges while declaring their patriotism for or against the Entente. Some Romanian communities in Bessarabia hoped for a defeat of the Russians. Some Romanian communities in Transylvania hoped for a defeat of the Central Powers. The supporters of the Entente prevailed and Romania fought a disastrous series of campaigns against the Central Powers, with devastating military and civilian losses.⁴ The wartime experience only hardened the negative perspective of the political and social elites, as well as that of many more lower-class inhabitants, *vis-à-vis* the ethnic Hungarians, Austrians, and Germans living in areas that later became part of Romania. The Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, which compounded the military losses suffered by the Romanian army during the war, was generally viewed as a disastrous outcome for a country that bordered Romania and as a present threat to its political and economic stability.

Within three years (1916–1919) Romania doubled in size, largely at the expense of Hungary and Russia. Though much larger than before the war, Romania remained a small and somewhat marginal state in the larger arena of European politics. Its enlarged size concealed significant vulnerabilities with regard to the multiplicity of laws and customs in each region; the disproportionate economic power of ethno-religious minorities in the newly acquired territories; and the huge economic and human losses during the war. Its ethnic makeup went from 92 percent to around 72 percent Romanian. This fact alone suggests important changes in the relationship between the claim to have a nation state and the reality of a multiethnic state in which, though in a majority, Romanians had to contend with a sizable proportion of people who: did not speak Romanian as their first language; did not observe the cultural and religious customs that became identified with the official rituals of the state; and overall resented having become somewhat invisibilized minorities in contrast to the position of power and authority that many in these groups had enjoyed before the war, often at the expense of the ethnic Romanians.

Romanian Feminisms before 1923

It is within this messy and inauspicious context that Romanian feminism began to develop in the nineteenth century.⁵ The aspirations of Romanian feminists in the independent Romanian kingdom were different from those of feminists living in Tran-

sylvania or Bessarabia. For those living as ethnic minorities in Austria-Hungary or the Russian Empire, political emancipatory work was focused on shoring up the interests of their ethnic group against discrimination by the ruling regimes. Liberal, conservative, or socialist women's groups in Austria-Hungary, dominated by Hungarians and Austrians, did not reach out to ethnic Romanians to engage them in work on behalf of women's rights.⁶ When the fortunes of those groups were reversed after World War I, the absence of trust along ethnic lines among women's organizations in Transylvania continued.

In the pre-1918 Romanian kingdom, feminists varied more in their perspectives on ethnic minorities.⁷ Some spoke directly and openly about their support for irredentism in relation to ethnic Romanians living outside the country. Some identified their feminism with their support for the Orthodox Christian traditions observed by the vast majority of ethnic Romanians, implicitly marginalizing Jewish, Catholic, and Muslim women. With over 90 percent of the population self-identifying as Orthodox Christian, this attitude is not surprising. A smaller group of feminists favored a socialist orientation and eschewed ethno-religious categories of identity in defining their values and goals.⁸ They remained marginal in postwar feminist networks and saw no representation or invitations to attend LEW events hosted in Romania.

What shaped the post-1918 institutionalization of feminism was the power of a few wealthy women in Romania (starting with Queen Marie) during World War I to throw themselves into charity work with a fervor the likes of which had never been seen.⁹ A community of hardworking, demanding, authoritative, and paternalistic women took shape in the three years of the war, and established themselves as the primary arbiters of things related to women in the Romanian state and social work scene during the 1920s.¹⁰ By the time women's organizations from Transylvania and Bukovina started to join established Romanian networks, the organizations from the Old Kingdom were already scouting their necessary connections in the new provinces. These were rarely egalitarian, open societies. They were led by aristocrats and other socioeconomic elites, and adhered to the hierarchical social structures those leaders enjoyed.

The only leverage that women's organizations from the newly acquired territories might have held was in the competitions between women's organizations from the Old Kingdom that sometimes occurred. Roxana Cheșchebec portrays these dynamics with great precision and exquisite detail.¹¹ Overnight, the number and types of affiliations among women activists and self-avowed feminists who lived in Romania became substantially more complex and difficult to coalesce into one network. Alexandrina Cantacuzino tried to establish such a network, with limited success.¹² Staying invisible in this chaotic environment served some groups well, if they wanted to be left alone. However, it also enhanced the power of philanthropist-turned-feminist elite women in relation to groups that wanted to be seen—the ethnic Romanian women activists from the defunct Austro-Hungarian Empire.¹³

Among the rising stars of Romanian nationalist feminism, Cantacuzino counts as a main protagonist in the LEW. Ambitious, smart, very wealthy, and with a proven record as a mother, wife, and philanthropist, in the decade before World War I Cantacuzino became involved in social work with a focus on supporting young, poor Chris-

tian Orthodox women (as either children or mothers). During the war she burnished her credentials by managing the largest hospital for prisoners of war (POWs) under German occupation in Bucharest through the National Orthodox Society of Romanian Women.¹⁴ She emerged somewhat bruised by unfounded accusations of collaboration with the Germans (she had in fact helped Romanian POWs escape to the unoccupied part of Romania), and found that she had staunch competition for leadership among women's organizations from aristocratic women who had spent the war months in Iași, working through charitable outfits under the queen's direct patronage.¹⁵

Even as signs of competition and conflict were becoming visible among Romanian ethnic feminists after the war, they managed to work in concert for women's enfranchisement at the time that a new electoral law was being discussed (1918) and then leading up to the new Constitution (1923).¹⁶ In November/December 1918, the act of union with Romania signed by Transylvanian leaders included among its top demands equal suffrage rights for men and women. That was subsequently disregarded by most male politicians, minimized even by those who arrogated themselves the authority to represent all people from Transylvania.

In those early days of having carried the water for the country while men were in the trenches, feminist organizations fearlessly called out the outrageous 1918 electoral law that granted full political rights to all men, regardless of their education (a majority of ethnic Romanian men were illiterate), while disregarding women's demand for the same rights. In 1919 feminists hung posters all over Bucharest, declaring: "We women demand the right to vote. The right that has been given even to illiterate men."¹⁷ Yet the male establishment did not relent. The queen remained publicly quiet on the issue of female suffrage.¹⁸ Nicolae Iorga's statements of support for the suffragists remained just words, not an amendment to the voting laws, even as he sat in the Senate. In March 1923, after years of pushing, cajoling, protesting, and shaming the political establishment, feminists saw their aspirations dashed: the new Constitution refused to recognize women as citizens with full rights, both civic and political.¹⁹ Two and a half months later Cantacuzino and other Romanian feminists went to the IWSA congress in Rome. Surrounded by women with similar aspirations and frustrations, she worked to establish a regional feminist network: the Little Entente of Women.

The Little Entente of Women: A New Stage for Performing Romanian Feminism

Cantacuzino was a leader in search of a following throughout her long and busy public career as an activist, patron, manager, and speaker.²⁰ In the congress's large assemblage of women, most of them wealthy enough to travel to Rome, representing privileged classes in their respective societies, the Romanian aristocrat felt both at home and also invisible.²¹ Romania was a small country that most participants had not heard of. The complexity of the political changes that had happened recently, narrated in the previous sections, were unknown and incomprehensible to many of those she met in Rome.²² She seems to have been drawn to the work of other postimperial feminists, such as the Egyptian Huda Sha'arawi, whom she later visited in Cairo and wrote about with great admiration.²³ She also found a sympathetic ear among some

French and British aristocratic women.²⁴ But overall, she came to the realization that within this large network, the specificities and needs of Romanian women became invisible, unless a group of allies could be pulled together to represent similar interests. Such sentiments existed among Balkan countries like Yugoslavia and Greece, and other postimperial European states like Czechoslovakia and Poland.

For Cantacuzino and her followers, the LEW became a vehicle that performed three simultaneous functions on behalf of Romanian feminist aspirations: first, a space to be seen by other feminists who either shared their suffragist aims and other frustrations, or could serve as a friendly, noncompetitive model; second, as a bloc in relation to larger transnational feminist networks, where feminists from postimperial states struggled to gain acceptance as legitimate representatives of all the women in those countries; and third, as a platform from which Cantacuzino could continue to press internal political and public opinion toward accepting her feminist network as “authentically” Romanian, rather than a foreign import. Publishing reports about women with Greek, Serbian, Czech, and Polish names rendered the LEW both transnational and also regional, cosmopolitan and modern, while also adhering to familiar cultural milieus and traditions. The very fact that three of the countries represented self-identified heavily, if not wholly, as Orthodox Christian societies was not lost on Cantacuzino and her followers.²⁵

LEW work started without delay, intersecting in midstream with initiatives already underway in Romania and other places. The first meeting of the group took place in Bucharest in November 1923. For the hosts it served as a bittersweet performance of what could have happened but did not in March 1923 with the newly promulgated Constitution. Romanian representatives spoke about all the reasons that women deserved the vote, and Polish and Czechoslovak speakers provided evidence of how those rights enhanced the well-being of women, society, and the state. As president of the LEW and host, Cantacuzino took great pride in featuring this stellar group of women before the educated elites of Bucharest.

Cantacuzino published all the main speeches and audience reactions in a self-contained booklet. Rendering her work visible was one of Cantacuzino’s lifelong preoccupations. She carefully curated these publicity efforts by making sure that the speeches appeared in French, the language most of these well-educated women used as their lingua franca. This choice, however, rendered the text less accessible to the vast majority of ethnic Romanians and to minority women from the newly acquired territories, where German, Hungarian, or Russian were predominant.²⁶

The titles and names of the non-Romanian participants in this first LEW congress were likely unfamiliar to nearly all attending the meetings or reading about them in the press. There was a Senator, a City Council Member, and a Doctor among the many Mrs. and Misses, with Cantacuzino as the only (self-proclaimed) Princess.²⁷ The awkwardness and lack of familiarity of these first encounters becomes visible through the inconsistent spelling and use of titles when identifying the participants.

The participating associations were also named for the first time in the Romanian public sphere, rendering visible the multitude of groups and self-representations of these feminist organizations: the National Council of Romanian Women; the Hellenic League for Women’s Rights; the Alliance of Women’s Suffrage and Central Association



Illustration 1. A. Cantacuzino meeting Queen Maria of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes at the second LEW conference in Belgrade (1924).

of Czech Women from Czechoslovakia; the Society for Women's Rights from Yugoslavia; and the Political Club of Progressive Women from Poland. The latter certainly represented a more daring assertion of women's political activities, with an adjective rarely used in Romanian feminist parlance—"progressive." In short, there were contrasts, there were similarities, and there was a great deal of "getting to know you" in this mix.

Who was not invited should also be emphasized: there were no Jewish women's organizations or representatives present, either from Romania or from anywhere else, including the countries where all women had gained the vote. There were no Hungarian, Austrian, or German women represented. And we don't know if any Slovak

women actually participated, or whether any Slovene, Bosniak, or Albanian women joined Serbian and Croat representatives as part of the Yugoslav delegation. In short, ethno-nationalism remained unquestioned, even as the construction of “Czechoslovak” or “Yugoslav” ethnic identity was still in the making.

The initial speeches, the first public declarations of these women’s motives for participating in the LEW, serve to frame the shared ideas and loyalties of the members. How speakers reached out to each other to mark themselves as allies, feminists, and in other ways seems particularly important in terms of revealing their contemporary understanding of how to develop common terms of engagement, from vocabulary and arguments for their demands to specific actions and goals.

The hosts spoke first and set the tone, starting with Cantacuzino. She explained the origins of the LEW in terms of goals, aspirations, and needs, underscoring from the beginning the wider significance of these activities for the whole of society. She represented the network as a spontaneous expression of “the spirit of association, fraternity, and conciliation” necessary among the people of “central and oriental Europe.”²⁸ The “spirit of association” was invoked as an avenue for leveraging the enlarged post-war borders in representing their countries collectively within transnational feminist networks. “Fraternity” (she seldom used “sisterhood” in her speeches) was a nod to the blood ties of ethnicities or races who had lived as minoritized communities in the prewar imperial settings. “Conciliation” represented the peaceful aspirations of the network’s founders toward regional cooperation. One might charitably also link “conciliation” to internal aspirations in each member country to arrive at a peaceful way to live together with the ethnic minorities in each country.²⁹

Cantacuzino’s reference to “central and oriental Europe” was her attempt to frame the LEW as part of a shared geography. “Balkan” does not appear here, in contrast to interventions from Greek members. Neither does “Southeast Europe,” which was used at that time in Romanian academic and public parlance in relation to the Balkans. It seems that, unlike other LEW members from the Balkans, in 1923 Cantacuzino did not have her eye on an expansive Balkan network.³⁰ Embracing “oriental” as a self-designation suggests that in 1923 this term was not viewed as derogatory, even as Cantacuzino wanted to be seen as a significant European feminist both in this and the larger transnational context.³¹ And by naming the participant countries through this dual geographic reference (“and”), she suggested that differences existed among the members, but that they were differences to become acquainted with and respect in a “fraternal” spirit, rather than to use to sow dissent among these feminists. Although these geographic references appear somewhat descriptive and innocuous, when paired with the reference to “races” in this and many other speeches, they gain a more ominous nuance.

Cantacuzino assured her guests, especially the Romanian politicians, elites, and press present in the audience, that the LEW wished to better serve the interests of all women and of their countries at the same time.³² Responding to the inflammatory critiques in the press and among many politicians that feminist organizations wished to derail their countries’ progress, LEW delegates were careful to state their loyalty to their countries explicitly. Such statements of loyalty, however, might have been heard by the recently minoritized Hungarian, Austrian, Ukrainian, and Russian women as

a very different message: as an aggressive rejection of the complaints ethnic minorities were leveling against Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia at the transnational feminist conferences like the 1923 Rome one. Echoes of those complaints became more visible in speeches given by one of the Czech delegates.

One of the interesting linguistic aspects of this and other speeches at the conference was the use of the words “feminist,” “feminine,” and “woman.”³³ The LEW represented women, but at times was referred to as “feminine.” “Feminist” was not in the title, but it was everywhere below that seemingly apolitical headline.³⁴ In speaking about transnational networks, Cantacuzino oscillated between naming them “feminine” (or more seldom, “women’s”—but the slippage is precisely the point, essentializing women as feminine and feminine as a core female attribute) and “feminist.” When speaking of “women,” she named the embodied category of cisgender females in their sociopolitical context. By using the plural, she signaled her ability to represent all women in Romania, even as only ethnic Romanians from the Old Kingdom were part of the Romanian delegation. Later on, she oscillated between the plural and singular, suggesting a homogeneous set of experiences for women during World War I and their coming into conscience of their value as citizens who deserved the same political rights as men. This rhetorical device was likely aimed at representing her loyalty to Romanian women and appreciation for their participation in civic and economic life; however, it also whitewashed the enormous differences between aristocratic Orthodox Christian women like herself and peasant women, as well as between her and non-Romanian or non-Orthodox women, millions of whom now lived in Romania.

The tension between such general claims about women in Romania and the important cultural and socioeconomic differences among various categories (religious, ethnic, class-based) of women became glaring when Cantacuzino referred directly to these differences in comparing Romania to the other countries represented at the conference: “here we are representatives of different races, traditions, religions, searching in noble ways [for] the best means to elevate the woman, protect the child, give new impulses to the cultural, social, and political life.”³⁵ By referring to “race” and “tradition” as distinct types of identity, Cantacuzino situated herself within the biological, hereditary discourse about ethnicity gaining popularity at that time. Traditions were a cultural attribute that women learned, while race was a biological attribute one inherited from one’s parents.³⁶ In 1923 eugenics had become a mainstream framework for biological and medical research in the region, and women participated actively in eugenicist organizations.³⁷ The language that Cantacuzino deployed to define who LEW members represented was carefully chosen to resonate with the contemporary racialization of ethnic identity in science discourse.

References to race as a category different from cultural elements, and thus implicitly biological and hereditary, return in other speeches by Cantacuzino and other representatives. “Race” was a term that did not need explaining before that audience; it was accepted as a rational and truthful representation of group identity. Race was used in a nonhierarchical sense here, to denote clear differences that separated the countries and ethnic groups represented at the conference. But these were understood as differences that called for reconciliation, reaching out to each other, and getting to know each other better. In short, even as she stated the factuality of race, Cantacuzino,

in a twin move to assuage any thoughts of enmity, posited that racial differences were in fact not insurmountable.

And yet race retains its more ominous exclusionary meaning even in such rhetorical contexts. Racial difference, understood as a genetic identitarian category, renders real the possibility of purported unchanging characteristics of a group. Cantacuzino's next rhetorical move was to remind her audience of the ability of the Romanian people to resist and remain unchanged for a thousand years.³⁸ The ethno-nationalist ideology of what is "essential" to a group (generally speaking, moral qualities and cultural specificities) and is transmitted intergenerationally became aligned with eugenicist ideas about the transmission of moral and intellectual collective characteristics through the maintenance of racial purity, vague as that may be.

Two other Romanians spoke at the conference: Calypso Botez and Ecaterina Cerchez. The former gave a short welcome focusing on the various ways in which "fighting" can be viewed as an attribute of women's work for improving society through private and public practices. Cerchez presented preliminary results of a survey taken with Romanian politicians, which revealed that 60 percent of them favored women's entry into political life.³⁹ Cerchez made sure to identify a few prominent names from the intellectual and political scene, such as Constantin Rădulescu Motru, Nicolae Iorga, and Gheorghe Tașcă, as supporters. However, their subsequent public actions, especially those of Iorga and Tașcă during the short-lived Iorga government, suggest that this support was rather superficial. Women gained limited suffrage rights in 1929 through the support of the National Peasant Party.⁴⁰

After the hosts, Dr. Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka took the floor.⁴¹ Budzińska-Tylicka is known for her affiliation with socialist networks and perspectives. Her speech hinted at those sympathies, especially in calling for women to become organized in professional unions in order to be fully considered within the current government and capitalist system.⁴² In describing the activities of suffrage activists in various countries, she painted an image meant to represent the specific context of LEW members, at once anti-imperialist and patriotic, with women engaged in "clandestine" educational activities during "the long years of slavery," which rendered them "more competent to obtain the right to vote."⁴³ Although Budzińska-Tylicka and many other participants had been discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity (and sometimes religion), the well-educated and mobile LEW delegates had not suffered the indignities of slavery. But this was the rhetoric she favored as a means to highlight the type of danger, privation, and overall suffering that Polish women had endured before 1918. It was both an appreciative as well as menacing description, another veiled takedown of the claims made by minoritized women's groups that they were being ignored or discriminated against. Budzińska-Tylicka did not name the Russian, German, and Habsburg empires and ethnic groups in power before World War I, but her audience understood that she was making a claim about the legitimacy of ethnic Poles to rule over Poland in relation to the discriminatory policies they had faced during the long period of the partitions.

More specifically in Romania, the mention of clandestine pre-independence achievements could also be read as a nod to ethnic Romanian women's organizations from the newly acquired territories, who had labored under similar conditions to Pol-

ish women before 1918.⁴⁴ Transylvanian women had in fact lost both the battle for universal suffrage after demanding it in 1918, and a series of important civil rights, when the administrative reform of the civil legislation was completed, with the more conservative prewar Romanian one prevailing unchanged on matters of gender.⁴⁵ The reference to clandestine work could also be seen as a move to shame Romanian politicians for having disregarded the irredentist activities of ethnic Romanian women in Transylvania prior to 1918 and their quest for getting the vote in 1918.

In crafting her image of courageous women taking their equal place in the voting booth after the war, Budzińska-Tylicka was careful to represent them as essential partners in advancing policies that benefited society at large and in shoring up the moral fiber of the nation. After providing many such examples, her conclusion—received with warm applause from the audience—was: “it would be inexcusable to refuse more than half of the citizenry [the right of] taking part in the municipal [public] works on the basis of sex.” She continued by stating that her argument in favor of political rights could also be made “from the point of view of social justice, and also the point of view of human rights as citizens.”⁴⁶ This may be the first time that the terminology “social justice” was used in Romania. Though the term can be understood to signal a commitment to equity across gender lines, the nationalist undertones of the speech remind us that such commitment was not inclusive of reaching out to ethnic minorities.

In describing the differentiated success of suffragists in Europe, Budzińska-Tylicka spoke about the “South and Occidental Europe” as a region that remained in an “abnormal state” of adhering to the “ancient regime,” by contrast with countries where women had gained the vote.⁴⁷ Unlike Cantacuzino’s, her geographic framing did not focus on shared commonalities in the LEW, but rather on the deficiencies of parts of Europe that may have been understood as covering some parts of the LEW, such as “South Europe.” As a geographic designation of some meaning, this was not a common reference and may have included Greece and Yugoslavia, in addition to adjacent Italy and Spain and France further west. It is unclear whether Budzińska-Tylicka was

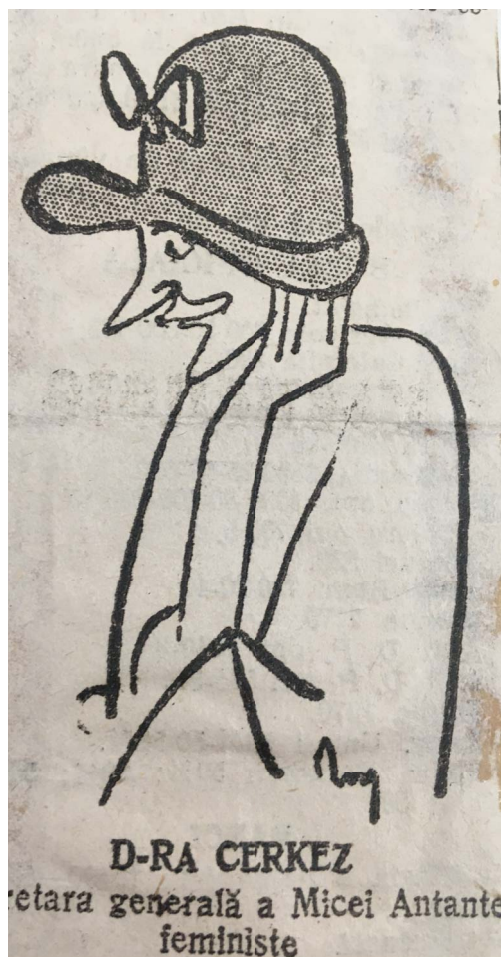


Illustration 2. “Miss Cerkez, the general secretary of the Little Feminist Entente.” Drawing from the first LEW conference, Bucharest (1923).

implicitly situating Poland as a model for feminist aspirations beyond the “ancient regime,” or whether she was reaching out more generally to members of the LEW as part of regions of Europe with greater potential in advancing feminist goals. Within that geographical division, women’s education and intellectual leadership stood out for this speaker as the most important factors in eliminating gender injustice. She made no mention of class warfare, a choice I see as a strategy to avoid alienating an audience of people who viewed Bolshevism as a cataclysm.

Budzińska-Tylicka concluded her remarks by speaking directly to the men in the audience, publicly shaming them: “We need to make men understand the grave injustice that strikes us—it is you I am talking to, Sirs—when a man who doesn’t know how to read or write has more rights than a female university professor!”⁴⁸ She repeated the same statement, addressing the men in the audience again, and adding that she could not accept the idea that illiterate men had more rights than women, when they had been working for the country’s well-being better than many men. The argument, though possibly just a strategic move in view of the audience of educated men and women at the gathering, strikes me as devoid of commitment to social justice in terms of class and not just gender. In essence, it was an argument on behalf of an elitist understanding of voting rights, upholding rather than challenging the idea that it was education that rendered citizens entitled to play a direct role in politics as an electorate, as opposed to other elements, such as paying taxes, working (productively or reproductively), fighting in the army, or simply living there.

The second Polish delegate, Eugenia Waśniewska, was a union activist and leader, as well as a staunch nationalist.⁴⁹ Like Budzińska-Tylicka, she referred to the history of the Polish people before 1918 as “enslavement” under three imperial powers, identified as Germany, Austria, and Russia. She described Poland as relatively late in developing feminist organizations. In this framework, early Polish feminism was inextricably entangled with the anti-imperial nationalist struggles and was in conflict with Austrian and German feminists living in the same territories. In the context of the Polish Republic, Waśniewska focused on the need to fully mobilize the female electorate for changes still necessary with regard to women’s full civil emancipation and social problems such as alcoholism and prostitution.⁵⁰

Speaking for the Czechoslovak delegation, Františka Plamínková marked herself from the first sentence as a representative of feminist organizations and quickly described “our people” as sharing the same mission, both in the past and into the future.⁵¹ Who was and who was not part of the two peoples became clear within the next paragraph. She described Romania as a reborn state, just like Czechoslovakia, which had suffered for centuries “barbarian invasions (Avars, Tatars, and Magyars).”⁵² The fact that no Czechoslovak state existed prior to 1918 and that the Romanian kingdom came into being only in 1881 did not stop her from making such grandiose and inflammatory statements. Plamínková had no problem naming the Hungarians as the common enemy of the two countries, who had “torn off” “our” Slovakia in the same way as “your” Transylvania.⁵³

The aggressive ethno-nationalist tone of the speech, peddling essentialist clichés of barbarians, common enemies, and victimization across centuries as the framework for anti-imperial struggles and emancipation, also spoke directly to the position of mi-

noritized groups after the war. She found the heroism of the Romanians in providing a “barrier” against “Turkish barbarism” parallel to the Czech barrier against “the modern barbarism of German expansion.”⁵⁴ The Romanians and the Czechs had retained their “national conscience” intact for three hundred years. Plamínková had nothing to say about the Romanian state’s official antisemitism from 1878 onward. Like Cantacuzino, she used “central Europe” as a positive descriptor of the region, inclusive of Yugoslavia. But she also deployed “balkanization” in its derogatory function, a move that may have struck the Greek, Yugoslav, and maybe even some Romanian participants as insensitive.⁵⁵

Plamínková used these rhetorical devices to point toward commonalities and the “fraternity” of all LEW members, and to ingratiate herself with the audience, especially the men, who enjoyed full voting rights after centuries of fighting the “barbarians,” while women awaited their turn. Plamínková reminded her audience that she spoke as a free citizen (by which she meant with full political rights) and that the goal of the LEW was to help lift each other up as free nations, including full political rights for all women. Her appeal to the men in the audience ended with a tribute to Tomáš Masaryk as a fervent supporter of equal rights for men and women. In describing his work as a great ally of Czechoslovak feminists, she offered examples of how male Romanian politicians could support the work of feminists in that country: through conferences, by advancing petitions of the feminist organizations in parliament, and by respecting the potential that all women had to enhance the well-being of small nations.⁵⁶ She offered Masaryk, a male figure culturally familiar and well respected among the Romanian male establishment, as a model of male allyship that would not compromise masculine power or values.

The second Czech delegate, Eliška Purkyňová, spoke as one of the two female elected officials, an embodiment of the successes of the suffrage feminist movement in Czechoslovakia.⁵⁷ Unabashedly nationalist and ethno-separatist,⁵⁸ she described Austrian rule before 1918 as “strangling Czech spirit” for three centuries and placed women at the core of the struggle against the “German-Austrian” regime.⁵⁹ She praised the Czech character of the current state, with the Slovak component silenced and submerged. She continued by critiquing the anti-nationalist perspective of the Communist Party as detrimental to the Czech state, going so far as to name the communists “enemies of the state” in all postwar countries.⁶⁰ To the notion that Czechs, Germans, and Hungarians could coexist in peace on the basis of class, rather than ethno-national solidarity, she responded by suggesting that the Germans and Hungarians should first adopt that ideology and see how well it went in their own states. This was a not-so-veiled reference to the failed communist uprisings in Germany and Hungary at the end of World War I, and was warmly applauded by the Bucharest audience. It had been the Romanian army that “liberated” Budapest from Béla Kun’s communist regime in 1919. As far as loyalties beyond ethnicity went, Purkyňová stated that the German minority would be welcome to fully take part in the public life of Czechoslovakia when “they stop[ped] hating our republic and declaring themselves its enemies.”⁶¹ This conditional participation of ethnic minorities seems to have been a shared perspective of Romanian feminists in the LEW, as was the presumption of hate on the part of ethnic minorities that used to be part of the elites of the prewar regimes in Austria-Hungary and Germany.

To soften the image of the work being done through the LEW, Purkyňová quickly pivoted to declare the aim of the network a “noble goal of reuniting the people who had suffered so much during the war, and who no longer wished to fight.”⁶² Like most other speakers in the network, she extended empathy only to ethno-national categories of oppressed people before the war, and implicitly excluded women from all other categories. Still, like other speakers, when describing gender discrimination, Purkyňová spoke of women as a general, undifferentiated category.

The one representative of the Yugoslav delegation, the Serbian Leposava Petković, provided a brief description of the *Ženski pokret* (Women’s Movement) club activities in Belgrade, a point of pride for the speaker, who was the president of the organization.⁶³ She also contrasted the situation in Yugoslavia to that in Czechoslovakia and Poland by projecting her own feelings onto the whole category of “women”: “How happy they [Czechoslovak and Polish women] must be, and how humiliated we [Yugoslav women] feel next to them!”⁶⁴

The conference ended with speeches by two Greek delegates, Avra Theodoropoulou and Mademoiselle Alexandru Ioanidés.⁶⁵ Theodoropoulou represented Greece as part of a larger family of neighboring nations from “eastern Europe,” with “racial affinities . . . more apparent among the people of eastern Europe than among Germanic races.”⁶⁶ She described this racial common ground as the foundation for developing solidarities among the “reunited feminine forces of eastern Europe” for the benefit of their respective countries.⁶⁷ Theodoropoulou was alone among LEW speakers in using “eastern Europe” as a cultural and racially distinct region, a shared demography and geography. Most racial discourses of the day differentiated between “Slavic,” “Mediterranean,” “Latin,” and “Nordic,” among the most often used descriptors that referred to race or ethnicity.⁶⁸ Despite her optimistic depiction of “affinities,” other speakers who referred to racial identity did not extend commonalities to such a large collection of countries and ethnic groups.

Ioanidés, by contrast, made several references to the Balkans but none to the racial affinities of the people of Eastern Europe. By stating that “The Little Feminine Entente embraces all Balkan countries, plus Poland and Czechoslovakia,” she hinted at a possible future orientation for the grouping.⁶⁹ In fact, as Daskalova and Dalakoura show in their contributions to this Forum, preoccupation with a more robust Balkan orientation became a leitmotif for several LEW leaders over the 1920s, resulting in several conferences in the 1930s to solidify this commitment. Moreover, Ioanidés contrasted the aspirations of the LEW to those of the formal Little Entente diplomatic alliance, highlighting the participation of Polish and Greek women, which she represented as a step toward reconciliation, peaceful collaboration, and the possibility of enlarging the entente further.

The first LEW congress provided the opportunity for delegates to get to know each other and to start listening to the frustrations, accomplishments, and aspirations that they brought into discussion as self-described representatives of feminist organizations from their respective countries. These public performances aimed to develop a common vocabulary about identity, shared historical experiences, racial bonds, and common values, even as significant differences in the histories and cultural traditions existed among the members.

Cantacuzino also arranged to have the events staged so as to allow the National Council of Romanian Women (NCRW) to present a series of reports about the work being done by feminists in Romania. Sandwiched between the opening and closing sessions of the LEW congress, the NCRW conference was attended by LEW foreign delegations. All speeches were delivered in French and some of the speakers addressed LEW delegates directly, thanking them for their attendance. A brief motion on behalf of the LEW was presented at the end of the NCRW event, urging the Minister of the Interior to bring about the emancipation of Romanian, Greek, and Yugoslav women.⁷⁰ All ancillary texts were published together with the speeches given at the LEW conference and a portrait of the group (see page 2 in this volume).⁷¹ This juxtaposition enabled Cantacuzino to present herself as the leader of Romanian feminist associations to her internal competitors. Her position was to be bolstered internally through the illustrious international audience applauding the NCRW's good works before Bucharest journalists, politicians, and members of the social elite.

Overall, the first LEW conference can be characterized as a starting point for establishing shared terms of engagement, while acknowledging differences among the member countries. Overall, commonalities pertained to shared histories of discrimination and suffering under imperial regimes, as well as a sense of racial attributes. Though never defined, these attributes were implicitly connected to this history of oppression and linked to biological rather than cultural elements. By the same token, speakers identified various geographic frameworks for understanding both what linked and also what differentiated these countries. For some, the Balkans was a common space, for others a derogatory reference. Some understood themselves to be from Central Europe, while others saw the region as the European "orient" or alternatively "East." These geographic references were in flux, not unlike today.

In their subsequent meetings and conversations, LEW members continued to evolve their vocabulary and negotiate over policy and other issues they wished to pursue in their respective countries and as a group. The question of political rights continued to frustrate the Romanian, Yugoslav, and Greek delegates. It became increasingly clear to the Romanians that the male political class looked upon these transnational links as neither a model nor leverage on behalf of feminist aspirations. At best, Romanian male politicians remained amused by these spectacles of feminist speechifying.⁷² At worse, they claimed that the Romanian feminists were creating problems for the "real" diplomats and politicians and should leave the business of diplomacy to those professionals. The LEW was described as a "Tour of Babel" and Cantacuzino's efforts at dispelling the treatment of Slavic minorities in Bessarabia as "naïve."⁷³

From the perspective of those already successful (the Poles and Czechoslovaks), an important aspect of the problems that women in Romania, Greece, and Yugoslavia faced was the insufficient education of women in their respective countries. While most women remained illiterate, lifting the nation through women's work remained a distant aspiration. Education represented a precondition for being able to assert demands for full political rights more successfully. As early as 1923 the issue of women's education had been raised by Budzińska-Tylicka and several of the Romanian speakers.

At the second LEW conference in Belgrade (1924), Polish and Czech delegates reiterated the importance of education, but did so in a more critical tone toward the

feminist leaders from Romania, Yugoslavia, and Greece, rather than just toward the male political establishment. Budzińska-Tylicka did not shy away from describing the situation in these Balkan countries as “backward,” replicating a rhetorical trope already deployed at the first conference by the Czech delegate who had identified “balkanization” as a form of devolution.⁷⁴ Sensitive to this stereotype, Theodoropoulou turned this statement of differences and hierarchies on its head, with a suggestion that women from the “emancipated” countries should be invited to speak about their successes in the “backward” countries, and that women from these latter countries should be invited to the “emancipated” ones to better understand the value of those rights.⁷⁵ Whether this was an honest or facetious proposal, we don’t know. It wasn’t taken up as an important part of future activities. In the meantime, Cantacuzino hosted a series of social events at her extravagant suite in the Hotel Excelsior, pointedly performing her economic privilege and personal connections to the Yugoslav royal house as having nothing to do with “backwardness.”⁷⁶

The question of regional differences became more visible overall, replacing the anti-imperialist rhetoric of solidarity that marked most of the speeches of the first congress. With each passing year of postwar independence, the weight of the imperialist past seemed to be less relevant than the pressing problems of the present. Theodoropoulou continued to invoke the need for inter-Balkan actions and better relations, something that the Romanians did not seem to favor.⁷⁷

By the mid-1920s Romanian feminists’ participation in transnational activism was becoming more visibly engaged with the criticisms of their treatment of minorities that women from the LEW received in transnational feminist settings. At several international feminist congresses, Cantacuzino was confronted with questions about the population of Bessarabia and about Romania’s treatment of ethnic minorities from the newly acquired provinces.⁷⁸ These criticisms came from Western European feminists, who had received complaints from women’s organizations representing ethnic minorities inside Romania and their allies in Europe (Hungary, Austria, Germany). At the 1924 Belgrade LEW conference, Cantacuzino repurposed some of the time allocated to the Romanian delegation to provide her own version of what the Romanian state was doing for its



Illustration 3. “Mrs. Dr. Tilinska.” Representing J. Budzińska-Tylicka, drawing from the first LEW conference, Bucharest (1923).



Illustration 4. Banquet at the second LEW conference, Belgrade (1924).

ethnic minorities, denying any willful or structural discrimination through post-1918 policies. She did so with the knowledge that a friendly feminist journalist from Bucharest would cover these remarks and publish them in the Romanian press, to reaffirm Cantacuzino's credentials as a loyal nationalist and an asset for the government's efforts to brandish their position in relation to the Minorities Treaty.⁷⁹

At the same time, Cantacuzino was well aware of the structural discrimination that women from Transylvania and Bessarabia suffered after those provinces became part of Romania, as the Romanian civil code took away civil rights that women enjoyed in their previous status as citizens of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian states respectively. However, she did not wish to make common front over these forms of discrimination with women from minority groups.⁸⁰ The question of what position ethnic minorities were supposed to have in the newly independent states continued to be a hot potato that the LEW seemed unwilling to engage with by inviting those actual groups into an open conversation on the topic. Each member country invited delegates to participate. The Romanian delegations never deviated from the core group of Cantacuzino's supporters, all of them ethnic Romanians from the Old Kingdom.

Other points of convergence emerged, however. LEW delegates focused on eliminating various forms of discrimination against women (often subcategories of women—married, unmarried mothers, widows) in their civil codes. Providing protection for children out of wedlock by introducing the search for paternity and alimony for such children was one issue that all members agreed upon. This became a focus for activism in each country, including Romania, after the second LEW congress. Eliminating all "articles from the Civil Codes that discriminated against women" became one of the resolutions of that congress.⁸¹ That resolution implicitly addressed the injustices done to women from the newly acquired territories in Romania and Yugoslavia,

in particular, and thus could have been perceived as a gesture of conciliation across ethnic lines between Romanians and Hungarians, for instance. But there doesn't seem to be any evidence that the Romanian delegation went out of its way to communicate that gesture to Hungarian women's groups back in Romania.

It is not clear whether the LEW played a direct role in changing the Romanian civil code. But in 1932, after a multitude of voices had advocated for it since 1918, the Romanian parliament voted to lift the legal incapacity of married women.⁸² With marriage a universal norm and the vast majority of women married, this change affected every family in Romania, regardless of ethnicity or religion, and provided the foundation for greater legal and economic autonomy for all women. This is the most important change that took place in Romania during the interwar period on behalf of eliminating fundamental structural gender inequalities.

New forms of performing gender and ethnicity were added to the LEW repertoire at the Belgrade conference. An exhibit of women's artisan work from the member countries put on a vivid display of the talent, expressiveness, and economic value of female workers as representatives of their respective cultures.⁸³ The choice of what to exhibit was driven by several goals: uniqueness in style, quality of the product, and sale value. The visual representations of the various member countries tended thus to privilege accepted clichés about what "national specificity" meant to the middling and upper classes of the newly dominant ethnic groups, the potential buyers of these products. But many Belgradians simply came to view this collection of artefacts as a curiosity. It was the first time that an all-women's arts and crafts exhibit was organized in the city. The exhibit as a point of voyeuristic interest and of consumption became a place where gender and ethnic attributes could be valued across class lines, while reinforcing those social divisions. Cantacuzino placed value in Serbian textiles by purchasing items from that exhibit, which had been produced by working-class Serbian women. The queen of Yugoslavia (the daughter of Queen Marie of Romania) brought attention to and elevated the value of the products from the Romanian stand by purchasing weavings made by working-class young women from her native country.

The issue of minorities' treatment continued to linger at LEW gatherings. At the third conference in Athens (1925), it became a focal point, resulting in a joint statement that simply deflected the problem, to Cantacuzino's delight. Addressing the situation in "the South East of Europe," the LEW called on all members of the League of Nations to apply the same principles on how minorities should be treated that they were asking the newly established states to consider, demanding the elimination of any privileges to that effect among the great powers. Notably, the resolution referred to "racial minorities" explicitly and exclusively, rather than to "ethnic minorities." With Britain greatly expanding its presence in Africa and France also taking over new colonial territories under its "protection" after World War I, such critiques were not without a point. But they certainly did not do anything to improve relations between ethnic Romanian feminists and minority women in Romania. The motion passed by the LEW in Athens reminded ethnic minorities that they "need[ed] to think of themselves as loyal subjects of the states to which they currently belong[ed]."⁸⁴ In short, even while pursuing some strategic internationalist openings toward at least one country considered revisionist (Bulgaria), the Romanian delegation, and Cantacuzino in particular,

retained an unbending view of fundamental differences between races and, implicitly, between Romania's minorities and ethnic Romanians.

After the resolution that signaled the desirability of a Balkan economic union, at the fourth LEW conference held in Prague in 1927, a Bulgarian delegation participated as observers and potential applicants.⁸⁵ For some LEW members, especially Greece, the goal of fraternal conciliation was beginning to include more direct lines of communication with women's groups in Bulgaria, Turkey, Albania, and Hungary. No longer interested in pursuing a hard ethno-nationalist line, some delegates (although not Cantacuzino) advocated for a revision of historical textbooks with the goal of "eliminating propaganda of hatred against other nations disseminated among children."⁸⁶

The center of gravity of the network seemed to be shifting more toward the Balkans as a region, something that became more apparent at the next meeting in Warsaw in 1929, the last known official congress of the network. The Polish organizers began their welcomes by "cordially saluting the delegates of the feminine organizations of the Balkan countries," placing Romania in the mix without further ado.⁸⁷

By the 1930s the LEW morphed into a looser set of relations among the member countries, with greater attention given to the possibility of an intra-Balkan network for cooperation. Cantacuzino had been losing ground among feminist organizations in Romania. From nearly one hundred affiliates in the early 1920s, her NCRW counted forty-two by 1927 and only eleven by 1937.⁸⁸ To feed her never-ending need for attention and success, she kept joining new international groups, like the International Federation of Veterans (FIDAC), which also became a means for communicating with like-minded LEW members from Poland and Czechoslovakia.⁸⁹ Through this new network, Cantacuzino sought to bring children from these two countries to Romania on vacations and to send young ethnic Romanians to Czechoslovakia and Poland, an incipient "study abroad" program. Overall, however, the economic crisis in Romania and the growing specter of European war became obstacles against sustainable transnational activity on the scale possible in the 1920s. By the time Czechoslovakia lost its independence, the LEW had ceased to exist.

In 1938 the newly established royal dictatorship of Carol II promulgated a law extending the vote to adult female citizens. Some celebrated this as a great achievement. But the value of women's suffrage in 1938 Romania needs to be placed in two important contexts: (1) prior to this law, the Romanian government had taken away citizenship rights from one third of Romania's Jewish population, rendering citizenship a racially defined concept; and (2) under the new dictatorship, there was one single party, and all eligible voters were obligated to vote for it. In my assessment this was an empty populist and racist gesture, rather than an earnest attempt to share political power or to emancipate women.

Gender, Race, and the Limits of Transnational Fraternity

The evolving discourse and foci of the LEW reveal the potentialities and weaknesses of the ethno-nationalism that anchored the view of women's rights held by some of its leaders. From the start, member countries where women had not gained the vote

needed to tread lightly around the ethno-nationalist suspicions of the dominant male political class and had to perform their own nationalist credentials to be taken seriously. Romanian feminists certainly saw that need in their quest to gain the vote.

In the case of Cantacuzino and her close allies in the NCRW, an ethno-nationalist perspective was already present and became further legitimized through her dialogues with LEW delegates at the first conference. In fact, a more extreme version of immutable racial differences as the foundation for both national identity and fraternal mutual respect was presented and amplified by members from several countries at the first congress. Such forms of exclusionary self-representation of identity did nothing to address the real problems women faced on the ground, problems that could only be fixed through dialogue and mutual understanding, with all categories of women present and able to voice their perspectives. Yet, in the case of Romania, such understanding was extended only to those who respected the country's borders and accepted its treatment of ethnic minorities. A sustained effort to reach out to ethnic minorities inside the country in good faith and through an open process never happened. Cantacuzino attempted a few public gatherings to that effect, but none with follow-ups and without establishing more permanent means for communication and collaboration, such as a federation for feminist groups.⁹⁰ In the end, the LEW remained an arena in which its participants could see and recognize each other, but with little effect on the major problems faced by their respective countries. The League was strangled by its members' own insistence on defining women's issues along ethno-racial terms, even as they sought to represent all women.

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◆ Notes

1. Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity," *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006), 30–50; Maria Bucur and

Krassimira Daskalova, "The History of East European Feminisms Revisited," *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* 4, no. 2 (2020), 23–27.

2. Oana Sînziana Păltineanu, "Converging Suffrage Politics: The Romanian Women's Movement in Hungary and Its Allies before World War I," *Aspasia* 9 (2015), 44–64.

3. William Oldson, *A Providential Antisemitism: Nationalism and Polity in Nineteenth Century Romania* (Philadelphia, PA: American Philosophical Society, 1991).

4. Glenn E. Torrey, *Romania and World War I: A Collection of Studies* (Bucharest: Center for Romanian Studies, 1998).

5. Roxana Cheșchebec, "Feminist Ideologies and Activism in Romania (Approx. 1890s–1940s): Nationalism and Internationalism in Romanian Projects for Women's Emancipation" (PhD dissertation, Central European University, 2005).

6. Judith Szápor, *Hungarian Women's Activism in the Wake of the First World War: From Rights to Revanche* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

7. Cheșchebec, "Feminist Ideologies"; Ștefania Mihăilescu, *Din istoria feminismului românesc: Antologie de texte (1838–1929)* [From the history of Romanian feminism: Anthology of texts (1938–1929)] (Iași: Polirom, 2002).

8. Sofia Nădejde was the most prominent of this orientation. See Anamaria Devesel, "Sofia Nădejde: A Nineteenth-Century Romanian Socialist Feminist" (MA thesis, Central European University, 2012).

9. Alin Ciupală, *Bătălia lor: Femeile din România în Primul Război Mondial* [Their battle: Women from Romania during the First World War] (Iași: Polirom, 2017); Roxana Cheșchebec, "Nationalism, Feminism and Social Work in Interwar Romania," in *History of Social Work in Europe (1900–1960)*, ed. S. Hering and B. Waaldijk (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2003), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-322-80895-0_4.

10. Cheșchebec, "Feminist Ideologies."

11. *Ibid.*

12. The state made a feeble attempt to register all social assistance organizations, for instance, but being registered incurred very large taxes, which incentivized many groups not to register and to operate semi-underground.

13. Cheșchebec, "Feminist Ideologies."

14. I use the Romanian acronym SONFR for this organization.

15. She came to blows with Olga Sturdza over the operation of wartime activities undertaken through SONFR. See Alexandrina Gr. Cantacuzino, *Cincisprezece ani de muncă socială și culturală, discursuri, conferințe, articole, scrisori* [Fifteen years of social and cultural work, talks, conferences, articles, letters] (Bucharest: Tipografia românească, 1928).

16. Cheșchebec, "Feminist Ideologies"; Maria Bucur, *The Nation's Gratitude: War and Citizenship in Romania after World War I* (London: Routledge, 2022).

17. Eugenia de Reuss Ianculescu, "Roumania: Report for 1919," *Jus Suffragii* [Voting rights] (March 1920), 91.

18. Maria Bucur, "The Queen is No Sister: Three Faces of Marie of Romania," *Journal of Romanian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2019), 77–104.

19. *Constituția din 1923 în dezbaterile contemporanilor* [The 1923 constitution in contemporary debates] (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990).

20. Cheșchebec, "Feminist Ideologies."

21. *Ibid.*, 525.

22. Susan Zimmermann, "The Challenge of Multinational Empire for the International Women's Movement: The Case of the Habsburg Monarchy," *Journal of Women's History* 17, no. 2 (2005), 87–117.

23. Cantacuzino, *Cincisprezece ani*.

24. Cheşchebec, "Feminist Ideologies."

25. I refer here to Greece and Yugoslavia among the initial members, and Bulgaria as an aspiring member.

26. German does not seem to have ever been used in the correspondence or public events of the LEW, even though quite a few of the women who worked in that group had to be fluent in the language. Anti-Austrian/German sentiment was also an integral part of the attitude that some members of the LEW brought to the organization, and thus French remained a neutral and acceptable lingua franca, much as it demarcated the LEW as an elite social group through its linguistic strategy. English was becoming, slowly, accepted as a necessary tool for networking and gaining international attention. Romanian feminists writing to *Jus Suffragii*, for instance, oscillated between predominantly using French and occasionally using English. Cantacuzino herself made both private and public efforts to encourage diplomats and transnational representatives of Romania, including women, to learn and use English. Her trip to the United States in 1925 may have in part generated a sense of greater urgency about the use of English at important transnational feminist gatherings.

27. Cantacuzino insisted on representing herself as Alexandrine Cantacuzene, not an uncommon practice among people from Romania to render their names more French-sounding. In the same booklet, Ecaterina Cerchez became Catherine Cerkez and Ecaterina de Reuss Ianculescu became Iancoulesco. These modifications, likely intended to provide greater visibility and accessibility in relation to non-speakers of Romanian, have instead served to render these women more difficult to locate in archives and other databases.

28. *1e Conférence de la Petite Entente des Femmes: Discours prononcés aux séances publiques des 3 and 4 Novembre 1923* [First conference of the Little Entente of Women: Talks given during the public sessions during 3 and 4 November 1923] (Bucharest: Tip. "Dorneanu," 1923), 9.

29. Not every ethnic minority in Romania or any other LEW member state had enjoyed a privileged position before World War I and then lost it. Jews, Albanians, Bosniaks, Tatars, and Ukrainians, for instance, were groups that had been minorities under Habsburg and Russian imperial rule.

30. For a discussion of the Balkan networks imagined by other LEW members and aspiring countries, see the articles by Krassimira Daskalova and Katerina Dalakoura in this Forum.

31. Cheşchebec, "Feminist Ideologies."

32. *1e Conférence*, 9.

33. In French, "feminist," "feminine," and "femme(s)." *Ibid.*, 10.

34. Yet the caption under the drawing of Ecaterina Cerchez identifies the LEW as "The Little Entente of Feminists." See Illustration 2.

35. *Ibid.*, 9.

36. On eugenics and feminism in interwar Romania, see Maria Bucur, "In Praise of Well-born Mothers: On Eugenics and Gender Roles in Interwar Romania," *East European Politics and Societies* 9, no. 1 (1995), 123–142.

37. Marius Turda et al., eds., *Health, Hygiene and Eugenics in Southeastern Europe to 1945* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2011).

38. *1e Conférence*, 10.

39. *Ibid.*, 21; "the vote" was not directly identified in the question.

40. Married women with a high school diploma could vote and be elected in municipal elections. The percentage of eligible women in this category was less than 1 percent of the total population, and therefore not much in the way of real progress for the vast majority of women. It is not clear how many of those eligible availed themselves of the new rights, but there are examples of elected female members of municipal councils, such as Calypso Botez, whose participation in governance did bring about positive changes in women's welfare. See Alexandra

Ghiț, "Loving Designs: Gendered Welfare Provision, Activism and Expertise in Interwar Bucharest" (PhD dissertation, Central European University, 2020).

41. In all the materials from this conference she is referred to only as Dr. Budinska-Tylicka, with a "Mrs." tagged at the front sometimes.

42. *1e Conférence*, 17.

43. *Ibid.*

44. Păltineanu, "Converging Suffrage Politics."

45. Maria Bucur, "The Economics of Citizenship: Gender Regimes and Property Rights in Romania in the 20th Century," in *Gender and Citizenship in Historical and Transnational Perspective*, ed. Anne Epstein and Rachel Fuchs (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2016), 143–165.

46. *1e Conférence*, 18.

47. *Ibid.*

48. *Ibid.*, 19.

49. She was identified sometimes as Madame E. Vasniewska and at other times as Eugenie Wasniewska.

50. *Ibid.*, 40.

51. She was referred to as Madame Plaminkova, Member of the Municipal Council in Prague.

52. *Ibid.*, 24.

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*, 25.

55. "The fear of balkanization of central Europe no longer exists." *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*, 29.

57. She was referred to only as Madame Purkynova.

58. In her contribution to this Forum, Gabriela Dudeková Kováčová provides a detailed description of the Czechoslovak LEW leaders' perspectives on nationalism and competition for top position among representatives of that country in the network.

59. *Ibid.*, 34.

60. *Ibid.*, 37.

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*

63. She was identified in the program only as Madame Petkovići.

64. *Ibid.*, 31.

65. The first was identified as Madame Avra S. Théodoropoulo and Theodoropoulo in the program. The name and title used by the latter, identified only by her (most likely) father's name, while leaving out her first name, is a reminder of the transition these feminists were experiencing in terms of developing a new vocabulary, including self-naming.

66. *Ibid.*, 43.

67. *Ibid.*, 44.

68. For the Romanians, "Latin" represented a particularly significant self-identifier, used to single out the significant differences between Romanians and Bulgarians, Poles, Russians, Ukrainians, Czechs, and other "Slavs," or between Romanians and Hungarians as "non-European" or "Asian." Reference to Romanians' Latinity also served to establish the indigeneity of the Romanian-speaking populations as the oldest known inhabitants of the territories that ended up making up Romania after World War I, a constant reference to historical rights to self-determination and rule over that territory in relation especially to the Hungarian minority in Transylvania. Cantacuzino made use of these tropes in other speeches. See Cantacuzino, *Cincisprezece ani*.

69. *1e Conférence*, 46.

70. *Ibid.*, 71.

71. See Image 1 in the introduction to this Forum.

72. Cheșchebec, "Feminist Ideologies," 307.

73. Central Historical National Archives of Romania (ANIC), Fond Cantacuzino, Dos. 46, 74.

74. *1e Conférence*, 130.

75. *Ibid.*, 118.

76. *Ibid.*, 83–84, article translated into Romanian from original in Serbian, which appeared in the Belgrade daily *Vreme* [Time] on 29 October 1924. The translated title appears as "Primul congres internațional al femeilor la Belgrad: Femeile Micii Înțelegeri feminine și-au început opera lor. Declarația președintei M.I.F., D-nei Prințese Cantacuzen cu privire la scopul congresului" [The first international congress of women in Belgrade: The women of the Little Entente of Women began their work. The statement of LEW president, princess Cantacuzen, regarding the goals of the congress].

77. It is not clear whether fear of Bulgarian irredentism in Southern Dobrodeja may have been the cause of this disapproval. There is no direct evidence of such sentiments on the part of Cantacuzino and the NCRW. More likely, their anxiety had to do with the implicit opening toward revisionism that such moves may have provided, which concerned Cantacuzino a great deal more in relation especially to the Hungarian minority in Transylvania.

78. Alexandrina Cantacuzino, "Drepturile minorităților" [The rights of minorities], *Universul* [The universe], 20 August 1925.

79. Fulmen, "Mica antantă feminină" [The little feminine entente], *Dimineața* [The morning], 30 October 1924.

80. Alexandrina Cantacuzino, *Conferința ținută de doamna Alexandrina Gr. Cantacuzino în ziua de 31 ianuarie 1926* [Mrs. Alexandrina Gr. Cantacuzino's talk on 31 January 1926] (Bucharest: Tipografia cărților bisericești, 1926), 7–8.

81. *Ibid.*, 8.

82. Bucur, "Economics of Citizenship."

83. ANIC, Cantacuzino Fond, Dos. 46, 104–105.

84. Cantacuzino, *Conferința*, 8.

85. *Petite entente des femmes*, *Bulletin de la V-e conférence à Varsovie du 25 au 28 juin 1929* [The bulletin of the fifth conference in Warsaw from 25 to 28 June 1929] (Warsaw: Bureau central à Varsovie, 1929), 5.

86. *Ibid.*, 5.

87. *Ibid.*, 1.

88. Cheșchebec, "Feminist Ideologies."

89. See, for instance, ANIC, Fond Cantacuzino, Dos. 116, 3–5.

90. Fulmen, "Marele congres al femeilor: Întrunirea consiliului național al femeilor române cu asociațiile femeilor minoritare" [The great congress of women: The meeting of the national council of Romanian women with the associations of minority women], *Adevărul* [The truth], 28 October 1925.