



# The Little Entente of Women, Feminisms, Tensions, and Entanglements within the Interwar European Women's Movement

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## ABSTRACT

This article discusses some aspects of the interwar women's movements and feminist activities in Eastern Europe and the Balkans in particular, taking as a starting point the creation of the regional feminist network called the Little Entente of Women (LEW). It shows that—despite the idea of “global sisterhood”—women's actions have always been conditioned by the agenda of male political elites. At the same time, the article highlights some entanglements of the feminist activities and initiatives that shattered the (fraternal) social contracts of nation states and, already before World War II, won certain aspects of citizenship rights for women throughout the region of Southeastern Europe.

**KEYWORDS:** entangled Balkans, interwar period, Little Entente of Women, Southeastern Europe, women's movements and feminisms, *Zhenski glas* (Women's voice), *Ženski pokret* (Women's movement).



Our Forum and my own research on the Little Entente of Women (LEW)—and on relations among Balkan women's organizations in general—are inspired by the relatively new (for Eastern and Southeastern European historiography) field of transnational and global history, which studies individuals, ideas, actions, and social practices that transgress national borders.<sup>1</sup> I am especially interested in the shared, connected, “entangled history” and *histoire croisée* of the mutually constitutive national, regional, and international women's movements and feminisms within their shared modernity during the interwar period, with its extreme and divisive nationalism. It is also interesting, for example, to observe how feminist and nationalist parlance came close together in both victorious and defeated states after World War I; that is, feminism was nationalized while nationalism was feminized.<sup>2</sup> Feminists—especially those from



poor Eastern and Southeastern European peasant societies—had to be loyal to their countries' political lines in order to rely on state support for their international travel and participation in various feminist gatherings.

## Sources and the "State of the Art"

This article is based on different kinds of sources, both primary and secondary. The first group of sources comes from archival collections kept in Bulgarian state archives (the State Historical Archive in Sofia, the Bulgarian Historical Archive affiliated with the SS. Cyril and Methodius National Library in Sofia, and the State Archive in the town of Burgas). These sources contain not only the personal collections of several Bulgarian women's activists from the interwar period (Julia Malinova, Dimitrana Ivanova, Ekaterina Karavelova, Vassilka Kerteva, and Zheni Bozhilova-Pateva), but also the archives of some of the important women's organizations from the interwar period: the Bulgarski Zhenski Suiuz (Bulgarian Women's Union, BWU) and the Bulgarian branch of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), also called also Traen mir (Durable Peace). I also use published primary sources, such as brochures and leaflets of various international gatherings, and articles that appeared in the newspapers and magazines of Bulgarian and Serbian/Yugoslav women's organizations, including *Zhenski glas* (Women's Voice), the organ of the BWU, and *Ženski pokret* (Women's Movement), the organ of the Društvo za prosvetivanie žene i zastitu nenih prava (Union for Women's Rights) (est. 1919; later known as *Ženski pokret*, after 1920), in which the activities of the interwar Bulgarian, Serbian/Yugoslav, and international women's organizations were discussed. In the Introduction to this Forum, we included an overview of the existing research and publications in English and local languages on this topic. Here, I add a few more titles in local languages.<sup>3</sup>

## The Little Entente of Women (LEW)

After World War I, women's movements and feminists in Eastern Europe and the Balkans established local networks in order to overcome their marginalization within international women's organizations and to articulate and contextualize their struggles within the complex postwar regional and world order. In May 1923, during the congress of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) in Rome, feminist activists from several Balkan countries (Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Greece), plus Poland and Czechoslovakia, created the Little Entente of Women (LEW), modeled after the male political and military Little Entente (LE), established in 1920–1921.<sup>4</sup> To be better connected with the IWSA and to have their voices heard in it, the founders of the LEW wanted to have their own representative "from the countries where women did not have the right to vote" on the board of the IWSA.<sup>5</sup> With the support of the French delegation, the new organization chose to be represented by the Greek feminist Avra Theodoropoulou.<sup>6</sup>

The goals of the LEW—transnational collaboration and actions for resolving “the woman question”—were already visible in the published minutes of the founding gathering:

We, the undersigned delegates of women’s unions, created a cordial agreement that will give us the possibility to support each other in all questions that concern women’s liberation, the defense of women’s and children’s rights, the big economic and cultural problems, and social hygiene, and to always try to avoid all kinds of misunderstandings that would appear between our countries; we promise to work openly and lawfully to eliminate all difficulties that would arise.<sup>7</sup>

The various members of the LEW appear to have claimed that the organization was established on their own initiative: thus, Romanian (supported by some Bulgarian) sources said that it was established on the initiative of Alexandrina Cantacuzino, who became its first president (1923–1924).<sup>8</sup> Yugoslav sources say that it was on their initiative,<sup>9</sup> and Polish sources that it was Dr. Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka, together with Cantacuzino, who initiated it.<sup>10</sup>

As is evident in the biographies of some of the leaders of the LEW already mentioned in the Introduction (Cantacuzino, Theodoropoulou, Plaminková, Petković), these women were involved in the guiding bodies of the large international interwar women’s organizations: the International Council of Women (ICW), the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA, later IWASEC or just IAW), the International Federation of Business and Professional Women (IFBPW), and the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Their participation in international feminist networks was mediated by the national branches, and thus it strengthened the “nationalization” of the women’s movements, encouraging them to create “national” associations and branches; that is, their structures were—as Susan Zimmermann put it—dual, or “inter/national.”<sup>11</sup> One way to fully understand the ideas and activities of such leading figures, the aims and goals of the organizations for which they worked, and the entanglements in the agendas of the LEW and the large international women’s networks is by following their life paths as national activists in their home countries, while also paying attention to their transnational actions and dedication to the women’s cause worldwide.

## The Program of the LEW

The founders of the LEW agreed to exchange reports regarding their activities in their home countries every three months and to organize joint meetings at least once a year. They emphasized that the most important guiding principles of the member organizations of the LEW should be openness, honesty, and loyalty to each other.<sup>12</sup> The meetings and the exchange between members encouraged joint actions on a variety of issues, elaborated in the LEW’s program.<sup>13</sup>

In general, the program of the LEW shared the goals of the IWSA and promised hard work to guarantee the social, economic, citizenship, and political rights of “the woman.” The LEW declared that it would struggle to help women to vote under the same conditions guaranteed for men of their respective countries. The program envisioned the protection of children and minorities in the workplace; protection of the welfare of out-of-wedlock pregnant women; and reforms to the treatment of their children. The LEW’s documents insisted on full equality between husbands and wives regarding their responsibilities and rights in the family, with regard to each other and their children, including custody and equal rights for divorce; on introducing civil marriage in all member states; on redefining household duties done by women as professional work and attaching a monetary value to them; on equal access for both single and married women in all professions and equal pay—to that of men—for the same work;<sup>14</sup> on eliminating all discrimination in the civil codes of the countries participating in the LEW; and on the protection of motherhood. The program, inspired by the spirit of pacifism and peace, also envisioned political, economic, and social activities and measures for effective protection of minorities in support of the acts of the League of Nations (LN). Interestingly enough, at the same time, the LEW was against all kinds of propaganda that would offend the national feelings of minorities or that aimed at awakening nationalist sentiments among minorities, established in any country.<sup>15</sup>

Thus, this was a “relational”<sup>16</sup> feminist agenda with polyphonic aims. The most important of these was perhaps suffrage, and taking into consideration that the LEW was the offspring of the IWSA, this comes as no surprise. At the same time, the LEW embraced the broader feminist goals of the interwar feminist movement, among them peace and pacifism, and the labor, professional, civil, and marriage rights of women, but also the rights of children and minorities. As already mentioned, some of the leading activists of the LEW were also part of the governing bodies of other (actually, the major) transnational women’s networks in the interwar period, such as the ICW, IWSA, IWLPE, and IFBPW, and the overlaps in the agendas of these organizations are understandable.

As elsewhere, access to education constituted the women’s earliest demand. The Bulgarian women’s movement was born during the Ottoman period, in the 1850s and 1860s, when about sixty (educational and charitable) women’s organizations existed in a number of large and small urban settings. The first national umbrella organization—the “bourgeois” Bulgarian Women’s Union, or BWU—was established in Sofia in 1901, following the creation of the Bulgarian nation state in 1878 as a constitutional monarchy with a foreign dynasty. In 1907 “equality” was established as a major task of the BWU. Together with the newly established feminist organization Ravnopravie (Equal Rights, also known as the Union of Progressive Women), the BWU became the engine of the suffragist movement in the country. Various other feminist trends were present in interwar Bulgaria—both from the left and right. Most visible among them were the leftist women: social democrats, already organized at the beginning of the twentieth century, and after 1919 communists as well.<sup>17</sup> The women’s organizations, which joined the fight for women’s suffrage and civil rights in the 1920s and 1930s, included Druzhestvo na bulgarkite s visshe obrazovanie (Association of Bulgarian Women Graduates, ABWG) and Zhenski Sotsial-Democratcheski Sujuz (Women’s

Social Democratic Union), both affiliated to international networks, respectively the International Federation of University Women (IFUW) and the International Women's Social-Democratic Movement.<sup>18</sup> With the restoration of parliamentary life after World War I, Bulgarian feminists petitioned the government to extend political and civil rights to women. Tradition, however, proved hard to break and the petition failed, women's participation in and contributions to the war economy notwithstanding. At the same time, Gypsy men in Bulgaria regained the vote in 1921, in recognition of their participation in the war—as the prime minister and leader of the Peasant Party Alexander Stamboliiski explained.<sup>19</sup>

During the 1920s, the BWU united sixty local women's associations with more than seven thousand members of various political orientations. Most of them were well-educated housewives. In 1926, within the context of escalating nationalism, a right-wing organization was established by a small group of women as part of the men's organization *Rodna zashtita* (National Defense) under the name *Bulgarski zhenski suiuz "Liubov kum Rodinata"* (Bulgarian Women's Union "Love for the Motherland"). Its insignificance notwithstanding, because of its name this organization caused some complications for the international standing of the Bulgarian women's movement at the time.<sup>20</sup>

In the interwar context, the Bulgarian minorities most discussed were those from the territories lost after World War I: those in Dobrudzha, lost to Romania; those living in the so-called *Zapadni pokrainini* (Western borderlands), lost to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenians (from 1929, Yugoslavia); and those from Thrace, lost to Greece. Apart from the territorial losses and reparations Bulgaria was obliged to pay, there was a huge refugee problem. All of these issues exhausted the already devastated Bulgarian economy and led to the rise of pessimism and nationalism.

The three major minority groups within interwar Bulgaria were Turks, Greeks, and Jews, who made up respectively 11.2 percent, 1.0 percent, and 0.8 percent of the total population. One should point out that even though the Bulgarian government at the time did not have uniform discriminatory policies, about two hundred thousand Muslims (most of them Turks) fled the country.<sup>21</sup> Nothing as extreme as the anti-Jewish laws in Romania, however, existed in Bulgaria before World War II. This tolerance toward "otherness," perhaps a legacy of the multiethnic Ottoman Empire, can help us understand why a Russian Jew—Julia Malinova, married to a well-known politician, the Democrat Alexander Malinov—and the half-Ukrainian Ana Karima, born Ana Todorova Velkova, whose mother was Ukrainian, were for more than twenty years in charge of the major feminist organization in the country, the Bulgarian Women's Union—something unthinkable in the Romanian context.<sup>22</sup>

Apart from the above groups, several new minority organizations of Bulgarian refugee women from Dobrudzha, Macedonia, Thrace, and the western borderlands appeared after World War I. In 1924 two Women's International Zionist Organization (WIZO) groups were created by Zionist Jewish women in Sofia and Plovdiv.<sup>23</sup> As we will see, two of these organizations—of Macedonian women and the members of the WIZO—participated in the work of the Bulgarian branch, affiliated to the WILPF.

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Bulgarian women's activists participated in a number of congresses of international women's organizations.

Thus in 1908, thanks to the participation of Bulgarian representatives Zheni Bozhilova-Pateva and Irina Sokerova in the congresses of the IWSA (in Amsterdam) and the ICW (in Geneva), the Bulgarian women's movement—first among the Balkan women's organizations—entered the international arena.<sup>24</sup>

## **Bulgarian Participation in Founding the LEW and Tensions among Balkan Women's Organizations**

The Bulgarian branch of the International Women's Committee "Durable Peace" (IWCDP) was created on 23 August 1918 in the Military Club in Sofia on the initiative of Bozhilova-Pateva and M. H. Angelova.<sup>25</sup> Between 1918 and 1926, the Bulgarian organization "Durable Peace," first affiliated to the IWCDP, was considered a branch, association, or subdivision of the latter. After 1919—when the IWCDP was renamed the WILPF—it became a branch of the WILPF.<sup>26</sup>

Two organizations reached out to the WILPF in 1919: the abovementioned Bulgarian branch of the IWCDP and the Makedonskiat zhenski suiuz v Bulgaria (Macedonian Women's Union in Bulgaria).<sup>27</sup> In the interwar period, several very dynamic personalities were in charge of the Bulgarian branch: Lydia Shishmanova (1866–1937), Vassilka Kerteva (1894–1967), and Ekaterina Karavelova (1860–1947).<sup>28</sup>

As mentioned in the Introduction, the Bulgarian branch of the WILPF, called Traen mir (Durable Peace) was among the founding members of the LEW in Rome in 1923. Bulgarian participation in this meeting was somewhat ambiguous and against the logic of the regional political unions and antirevisionist character of the new organization. At the same time, such participation shows that women's activists did not always do what was expected of them by the political requirements and "national" interests of their countries.

For example, one of the leading figures of the Bulgarian Women's Union at the time and editor in chief of its publication *Zhenski glas* (Women's Voice), Dimitrana Ivanova, saw in the women's entente a weapon of France against Russia and all defeated countries. Furthermore, she criticized the participation of the Bulgarian organization Traen mir because, in her understanding, the Bulgarian representatives worked against the major principle of the WILPF, which itself worked against separate political alliances such as the LEW and pleaded for one general union that would unite all states with equal rights and duties.<sup>29</sup> It seems that Ivanova was irritated that the major Bulgarian umbrella organization at the time—the BWU—was not among the representatives of the LEW.

In a recent article, a Serbian colleague wrote that "Bulgarians did not come to the congress in Bucharest nor did they send explanation [as to] why."<sup>30</sup> The materials regarding the 1923 Bucharest congress, however, reveal an episode that hints at the tensions between Bulgarian and Serbian feminists. According to some Bulgarian sources, Bulgaria was excluded from the LEW at the Bucharest meeting after three days of heated debates due to conflicts that broke out between the representatives of the two countries during the Podebrade summer course (1923), organized by the WILPF. It seems that the Bulgarians provoked the Serbian participants with the materials they

brought regarding the situation of Bulgarian minorities in the territories lost after the war to Greece, Romania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. Serbian feminists saw in this act a chauvinist provocation, while the Bulgarians justified their plea for the rights of the Bulgarian minorities with American President Woodrow Wilson's famous "Fourteen Points," or principles for enduring peace, and his ideas on self-determination and peaceful resolution of controversial national and ethnic problems.<sup>31</sup>

The attitude of the Bulgarian feminists came from their wishful thinking and trust in the principles articulated in Wilson's "Fourteen Points." They seem to have believed that if implemented, Wilson's ideas would mutually guarantee the political independence and territorial integrity of both "great" and "small" states alike. One of these leading activists, Zheni Bozhilova-Pateva, even wrote an open letter to President Wilson, published in one of the major Bulgarian daily newspapers, *Utro* (Morning), asking for his support for the Bulgarians—thus not only nationalizing the actions of the Bulgarian feminists, but feminizing nationalism as well.<sup>32</sup>

When you proclaimed your great principles about the force of law, about the rights of small nations, about national self-determination and peace based on amity, we believed that this is our own striving heard by the heavens, we believed that our sad history is over and the dawn of our people's prosperity is coming. We embraced your principles as God's commandments for our future life. With great patience we expect soon to witness the decisions of the peace conference and hope that your authoritative voice will have the most important impact for the fair resolution of all controversies between the European states and especially among the Balkan states.<sup>33</sup>

Bozhilova-Pateva's participation in some of the feminist conferences was financially supported by the Bulgarian government. It is no wonder that during her speeches at international forums such as the Hague conference of the WILPF in 1922, while she was speaking for peace and against violence, the "enslavement" of people, and injustice, she also insisted on the revisions of the peace treaties and spoke about the difficult daily existences of ordinary people in defeated countries: about the huge reparations they were expected to pay and the concomitant economic hardships.<sup>34</sup> Other Balkan women's activists who participated in international conferences in the 1920s also relied on their own governments to cover their (travel) expenses. This was the case, for example, for the Yugoslav participants in the first LEW conferences held in Bucharest in 1923.<sup>35</sup> Their insistence on the exclusion of Bulgaria from the LEW comes as no surprise.

Taking into consideration the LEW's goals articulated at the Bucharest congress and especially "the mutual defense of minorities,"<sup>36</sup> it becomes clear how fragile international feminist solidarities were in a world of symbolic and real power hierarchies in which nationalism was prioritized. While the Czechoslovak delegation was very much against the exclusion of Bulgaria, Romanian participants supported the Serbians. The title of an article in the Belgrade newspaper *Vreme* (Time)—"LEW complements the Little Entente of Men"—from which the Bulgarians took the above information, already implies that this women's organization followed the agenda of male political

alliances.<sup>37</sup> It is no wonder that the publication of the Bulgarian Women's Union, *Zhenski glas*, commented that Bulgaria's exclusion should be accepted as a favor.<sup>38</sup>

The issue of Bulgarian membership continued in 1927 when, in order to support "peace and pacifism among all nations from the region," the LEW's Prague conference voted, against the strong opposition of Cantacuzino, to support Avra Theodoropoulous's suggestion to enlarge and open the Entente to feminist organizations from Albania, Bulgaria, Turkey, and Hungary.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, the conference in Prague discussed the necessity to reorganize the LEW into two sections: Balkan (with Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) and Middle European (with Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and—possibly—Austria).<sup>40</sup> A Bulgarian delegation was present in Prague as observer and potential applicant.<sup>41</sup> A later document, created after the Warsaw conference in 1929, repeated this proposal, which implies that the Prague decision was never implemented.

In the late 1920s, following the political developments in the region, the Greek feminists proposed the establishment of a federation of Balkan states as a way to solve the "Balkan question" and to tone down Balkan nationalisms<sup>42</sup> (a topic discussed in detail in Katerina Dalakoura's contribution for this Forum). They argued that the LEW showed the way to build peace around the world.

The Entente gradually became inactive after 1929 and its initiatives were replaced by other regional actions by women from the Slavic and Balkan countries. Interestingly enough, although according to the preserved official documents of the LEW, its activities declined by the late 1920s, during the 1930s the publication of the Yugoslavski zenski savez (Yugoslav Women's Union) continued to keep the spirit of the LEW alive and regularly informed its readers about the activities of women from the "lands of the Entente" (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Poland), most often regarding joint exhibitions.<sup>43</sup> Otherwise, as we will see below, at least some of the leaders of the LEW tried to revive its activities and presence in the Eastern European feminist scene.

## The Bulgarian–Serbian/Yugoslav Controversy

The 1923 exclusion of Bulgaria from the LEW did not put an end to the tensions and controversies between the Bulgarian feminists and the leaders of the Serbian and Yugoslav women's movement. Bulgarian activists, including some who were not affiliated to the LEW, continued the unfriendly polemics with the Yugoslav feminists. It is no wonder that in an article in *Ženski pokret* in 1927,<sup>44</sup> Serbian feminist Mileva Petrović stigmatized the Bulgarian "professional patriots" and appealed to separating the ideas and actions of Serbian and Bulgarian politicians from those of ordinary people in both nations. Replying to her, Dimitrana Ivanova—then already President of the Bulgarian Women's Union—asked "Serbian women" to forget the extremes and horrors of war and to stop calculating wartime villainy and misdeeds. She insisted that what happened during the war could not be an excuse for political actions in times of peace. Ivanova expressed her doubts that peace in the Balkans would be possible under the conditions created by the treaties after World War I. For Ivanova and other Bulgarian



feminists of the interwar era, Serbian accusations regarding Bulgarian “professional patriotism” distorted the real problem: the lack of guarantees of the rights of Bulgarian minorities in the neighboring Balkan countries.<sup>45</sup>

The Bulgarian–Serbian exchange continued over the next several months. In an article in *Ženski pokret* published at the beginning of February 1928, Petrović expressed how deeply disappointed she was with Ivanova’s arguments; the latter, according to her, used “the same male language, the same retold story,” which had often brought Bulgarians and Serbians to war, mutual accusations, and investigations.<sup>46</sup> Instead of this, Petrović wanted to see Serbian and Bulgarian women involved in joint actions defending women in both countries from their exploiters—actions for the enlightenment and liberation of Serbian and Bulgarian women, for civil rights, for free speech, for collaboration in schooling and educating children (both schoolboys and schoolgirls) in common values, and for creating a spirit of mutual trust and appreciation, leading to the “great ideal of the Yugoslav people—its unification.”<sup>47</sup> Obviously, here Petrović included within the notion “Yugoslav”—that is, “South Slavic” people—the Bulgarians as well, who were not part of the Kingdom of Serbians, Croats, and Slovenes.

The 1 March 1928 issue of the Bulgarian *Zhenski glas* was specifically dedicated to Bulgarian–Serbian relations—general political relations on one hand and feminist relations on the other—and it tried to address all questions raised in the abovementioned article by Petrović.<sup>48</sup> Ivanova continued in the same militant tone to criticize the positions of the Serbian feminists and expressed her doubts about the possibility of getting along with them, since Petrović and her “proselytes,” according to Ivanova, admired “the red flame of the revived, great brotherly Russia.”<sup>49</sup> Ivanova insisted that “bolshevism” and “fascism” were equally ruinous for liberty and peace, and that in order to create a united Balkan or Yugoslav state, it was necessary to respect the rights of all peoples in Southeastern Europe, and that Serbia “should stop its greedy appetite to suck up foreign peoples.”<sup>50</sup>

To counter the Serbian opinion, the same issue of *Zhenski glas* published various materials by Bulgarian politicians and scholars<sup>51</sup> regarding history, demography, and Bulgarian minorities outside the country, claiming to present “objective” and “unbiased” scholarship that would lead to mutual understanding and tolerance between “the Serbian and the Bulgarian people.” One can doubt, however, whether the Bulgarian feminists achieved their intended goals, to help Serbian and Yugoslav women activists to see “the historical” or “scholarly” truth.

Only after January 1937, when the Bulgarian and Yugoslav states signed a pact for “eternal friendship,” was the proper climate for real improvement in the relations between Yugoslav and Bulgarian feminists created.<sup>52</sup> This new context notwithstanding—as can be seen in the pages of the BWU publication, when in 1937 some categories of women in Bulgaria for the first time obtained the right to vote in local elections—the Bulgarian feminists were disappointed by the reaction of their Yugoslav “sisters.” Instead of supporting and congratulating Bulgarian feminists concerning this (indeed, partial) achievement, as was the Bulgarian expectation, the newspaper of the Yugoslavenski ženski savez, *Glasnik* (The Herald), published an unfriendly comment that Yugoslav women “wished Bulgarian women would not execute this right at all.”<sup>53</sup> A couple of months later, when, with the restoration of the Constitution, some categories

of women in Bulgaria were granted the right to vote in parliamentary elections, Yugoslavenski zenski savez finally sent the long-expected congratulations.<sup>54</sup>

Such devising of fragile loyalties is deeply inherent in the feminist project: not only in relation to nation and ethnicity, but also to class, race, religion, sexuality, and so on.<sup>55</sup> Interpretations of the preferences and choices of these feminist projects are complex and additionally complicate questions of international women's solidarity. It is difficult to reconcile the contradictions between the feminists in these two neighboring South Slavic countries, which were affected differently by the war, in which both sides suffered cruelties and lost human lives. As already mentioned, minority rights were a major issue for Bulgarian activists in the interwar period, while for the feminists from victorious countries like Yugoslavia and Romania, such an attitude was considered a manifestation of extreme (revisionist) nationalism. As the contributions of two of my colleagues—Maria Bucur and Gabriela Dudeková Kováčová—in this Forum demonstrate, the ethno-nationalism of some Romanian (Alexandrina Cantacuzino) and Czech feminists (Františka Plamínková and Eliška Purkyňová) was not any better, not to mention the offensive, stereotypical, and bossy manner in which Dr. Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka preached to the “backward” Balkans. The point is that while the nationalism of the “victorious” feminists was not under scrutiny at the time, that of the “revisionists” was permanently exposed and stigmatized.

The tensions between national loyalties and solidarities on the one hand, and “global sisterhood” on the other, are visible not only in the already-mentioned debates regarding Bulgarian participation in the LEW, but also in the actions of Bulgarian and other activists during the congresses of international women's organizations—where they often presented the political agendas of the male political establishments of their countries—and in the reactions of the leaders of international women's networks in the complicated international context of the 1920s and 1930s. International feminist organizations at the time operated across the geographical borders of nation states with liberal, dictatorial, authoritarian, and totalitarian regimes.<sup>56</sup> For the leaders of these huge networks it was impossible to know the real character of their branches around the world, which sometimes led to misunderstandings, bitterness, and pessimism about the possibility of overcoming the contradictions between the nations and creating a global feminist solidarity.

For example, a letter dated 15 February 1937, sent by the leaders of the Bulgarian branch of the WILPF—the internationally known liberal feminist Ekaterina Karavelova (President) and Vassilka Kerteva (Secretary)<sup>57</sup>—to the Central Board of the WILPF, insisted on accepting as members of the Bulgarian section women coming from “Macedonia, Dobroudzha, Thrace, the Western regions, and the Jewish association WIZO”<sup>58</sup> as well. This not only caused confusion within the leadership of the WILPF at the time, but was also misinterpreted some years ago by the well-known American historian Leila Rupp as a manifestation of “Bulgarian fascist women”!<sup>59</sup> While we can excuse the interwar activists in the West for their lack of reliable information about their branches, contemporary historians do not have such excuses for their ignorance.

In fact, for her whole life Karavelova was actively involved in various progressive actions defending peace, freedom, and people's rights. Two facts from her biography are worth noting: in 1933 she was a founding member of the Bulgarian committee for

the defense of the Jews in Germany, and in May 1943 she was one of the Bulgarian public figures who helped stop the deportation of Bulgarian Jews to Nazi concentration camps. For her extraordinary contribution to Bulgarian public life and women's issues, Karavelova received many decorations, including the highest medal for civic virtues *Za chovekoljubie* (For love of humanity).<sup>60</sup> As Karen Offen rightly points out, since the late nineteenth century throughout Europe whatever feminists did they were "first patriots and then women."<sup>61</sup>

Francisca de Haan has recently emphasized that "research on women's movements and feminisms that limits itself to national contexts—whether it focuses on ideas, particular struggles, individual women or organizations—simply misses a great deal of these histories and crucial transnational links."<sup>62</sup> As the above example also shows, the history of transnational feminism cannot be properly addressed without taking into account the national contexts and knowing at least a little about the real identity of activists and the national women's organizations around the world, which participated in international feminism. Rather than labeling feminists from East European women's movements belonging to varieties unknown in the west, it would be more correct to pay closer attention to their life trajectories and actions. Scholarly standards should be the same when working on Western and East European women's and gender history.

## Other Regional Women's Initiatives during the 1930s

According to the preserved materials of the LEW, after its Warsaw 1929 meeting it planned to hold another congress in Bucharest in 1931, but its activities were interrupted, and for the next four years no official events were scheduled.<sup>63</sup> A possible explanation for this interruption could be that its activists (for whom the metaphor "Jane of all trades" would be appropriate<sup>64</sup>) and member organizations had to participate in some newly established regional networks: the Association Unity of Slavic Women (or the Union of Slavic Women); Inter-Balkan Conferences; Inter-Balkan Women's Conferences for Peace; and the Balkan Entente.

### *Association Unity of Slavic Women*

The Association Unity of Slavic Women (AUSW) was established in 1929 with the participation of women from Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Russian émigré women. The initiative came from Bohumila Smolarova-Čapkova and is considered a continuation of the idea of Slavic unity formulated by the nineteenth-century Slovak writer, scholar, and politician Jan Kollar (1793–1852), the main ideologist of Pan-Slavism.

The AUSW aimed at building "Pan-Slavic spirit and solidarity; promotion of the cultural, national, and educational achievements and traditions of all Slavic peoples."<sup>65</sup> According to its founders, the association was "neither feminist, nor political," its main goal being the issue of women's work. Although denying being a political organization, it nevertheless propagated and worked for peace. It held congresses in

Prague (1930), Warsaw (1931), and Belgrade (1933), and envisioned its 1935 congress to be held in Sofia, although this was postponed and held in Prague in 1938.<sup>66</sup>

In 1931 the Polish headquarters of the AUSW sent to the feminist BWU an invitation to the congress in Warsaw and asked Bulgarian activists to comment on the Statute of the All-Slavic Union of Women's Organizations.<sup>67</sup> It seems that the Bulgarians did not participate in the Warsaw congress: documents show that Bulgarian women did not join this association until 1933. At that meeting of the Slavic women in Belgrade in 1933, Dimitrana Ivanova, the leader of the Bulgarian Women's Union, proposed that the Russian language be accepted as an official common (working) language for all member organizations, but I could find no documents confirming that this was done.<sup>68</sup>

Between 1933 and 1938, the AUSW was chaired by Delfa Ivanić—vice president of the Yugoslav women's alliance. As previously shown, such rotation of leadership was part of the arrangements of the LEW as well. In her 1938 report to the Prague conference, Ivanić presented the activities of the Slavic women's union during her five years in office.<sup>69</sup>

### ***Inter-Balkan Conferences***

The feminist entanglements in interwar Southeastern Europe took place not only among the agendas of various women's organizations—national, regional, and international—but also between women's and feminist organizations and other local, male-dominated political initiatives. Such were the Inter-Balkan Conferences held in 1930–1934 to discuss the possibility of fulfilling an old historical dream in the Balkans: creating a Balkan union as a way to secure peace in the region. The "Statute of the Balkan Conference," accepted at the First Balkan Conference in Athens (5–12 October 1930), envisioned that the delegations of all six Balkan countries would include members of "different alliances, [and] representatives of various associations, circles and professions from each respective country."<sup>70</sup> Permanent peace and the creation of a Balkan economic and political union were the two main goals of this first meeting. Although women were a minority among the state delegates coming from Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkey, and Yugoslavia, the Greek feminist Avra Theodoropoulou played an active role at the conference.<sup>71</sup> Women's organizations from the participating states succeeded in joining some of the committees dealing with political and social issues, in which they tried to discuss questions related to the nationality of married women, children's rights, and women's civil rights. Thanks to the abovementioned Statute, the (male) leaders of the Bulgarian National Group, affiliated to the Balkan Conference, invited as members the two already-mentioned women leaders of the most visible and dynamic women's organizations in the country: Dimitrana Ivanova, the chairwoman of the BWU, and Ekaterina Karavelova, in charge of the Bulgarian branch of the WILPF.<sup>72</sup>

The Second Balkan Conference was held at Yildiz Palace in Istanbul from 19 to 26 October 1931. All Balkan nation states were represented at the event: Albania, Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, and, of course, Turkey. There were three official Romanian female delegates: Cantacuzino, Botez, and Catherine Cerkez Atanasiu.<sup>73</sup> The Bulgarian and Yugoslav delegations included one female participant each: Dimitrana



**Image 1.** Second Balkan Conference, Istanbul, 1931.

First row, first on the left: Dimitrana Ivanova, the President of the Bulgarian Women's Union between 1926 and 1944. Source: Bulgarian Historical Archive, SS. Cyril and Methodius National Library, Sofia, fond (archival collection) 584 (Dimitrana Ivanova).

Ivanova and Militza Topalović, representative of the Yugoslav branch of the WILPF, respectively. In the official Greek delegation of twenty-eight persons there were two women, while among all Greek participants five were women, representing three women's associations.<sup>74</sup> The Turkish female delegates were four, all of them activists of the Union of Turkish Women.<sup>75</sup> The female participants at this conference submitted a number of reports addressing "women's issues" and the progress of women's rights in different countries in the region, for instance regarding hygiene and social reforms, prostitution and trafficking of women, women's professional rights and working conditions, and the protection of women and children. They also suggested some economic and cultural actions that sounded utopian at that moment. Among them were the adoption of a single currency and the establishment of a customs union among the Balkan economies to facilitate the travels of middle and high school students, as a way to develop durable peace and friendship among the nations in Southeastern Europe.<sup>76</sup>

### ***The Inter-Balkan Women's Conference for Peace***

In the early 1930s, the international and regional women's networks undertook a number of initiatives, among them those of the WILPF for disarmament and peace.<sup>77</sup> At

the local level women also organized such actions. In May 1931 the Bulgarian press reported on the Inter-Balkan Women's Conference for Peace in Belgrade, with the participation of organizations from Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkey, and Yugoslavia.<sup>78</sup> Avra Theodoropoulou, who chaired the conference in Belgrade, recommended the establishment of a union of Balkan women in order to guarantee better coordination among women from the region. Several joint initiatives were discussed, which included exchanges of women from universities, museums, and libraries in the Balkan countries and the opening of special libraries to promote their cultures and those of their peoples. Among the participants in the conference were the leader of the Bulgarian feminists Dimitrana Ivanova and the social democrat Ivanka Bozvelieva.<sup>79</sup>

### ***Balkan Entente***

Parallel to the above initiatives, the continuing divide between antirevisionist and revisionist states in the Balkans led to the creation of the Balkan Entente (or Balkan Pact) in Athens in February 1934 by representatives of Romania, Turkey, Greece, and Yugoslavia, with the main goal to secure the territorial status quo of their states against "Albanian and Bulgarian revisionism."<sup>80</sup>

Interestingly enough, precisely during that time and counter to the policy of the male political establishment, Alexandrina Cantacuzino, convinced that women's solidarity in the Balkans should overcome the growing tensions in the region, paid a friendly visit to the Bulgarian Women's Union.<sup>81</sup> The amicable relations between the Romanian and Bulgarian feminists continued in the following years: in 1938, when according to the new Constitution women in Romania received the right to vote for the two legislative bodies of the Romanian parliament, the Bulgarian women's press publicized a number of materials about their success, including a radio talk by Alexandrina Cantacuzino regarding women's suffrage in Romania.<sup>82</sup> At the same time, Cantacuzino was among the first European feminists to congratulate the BWU when women in Bulgaria received the parliamentary vote as well. Moreover, after the thirty-second congress of the BWU, held in the Danubian border town of Rousse in September 1938, four hundred Bulgarian participants boarded two ships to the neighboring Romanian town of Giurgiu and from there traveled to Bucharest to pay a friendly visit to the Romanian Women's Union (with Cantacuzino in charge).<sup>83</sup>

It can be argued that these events and initiatives, in which Slavic and Balkan women participated, help to explain why after 1929, the LEW gradually declined. The feminist organizations were few in number and the same women activists participated in all feminist events. Thanks to the personal contacts and efforts of its leaders, however, information regarding the LEW continued to make its way into the Yugoslav and Bulgarian periodicals. In the 1930s Františka Plamínková tried to revive the Entente.<sup>84</sup> Another effort was made in 1935 in Paris during the ninth congress of the ICW, when the representatives of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and Romania agreed to renew the LEW. In 1936 Irena Malínská, then in charge of the Czechoslovak branch of the LEW, Vice President of the Czechoslovak People's Women's Union, and Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasized the necessity for the LEW to try and overcome the contradictions among member states and work together for the establishment of world peace.<sup>85</sup>

During the second half of the 1930s the countries of the LEW undertook a number of initiatives to revive the organization. For example, in 1936 several exhibitions of women artists and architects were organized in Belgrade, Bucharest, and Prague. Perhaps one of the last manifestations of the LEW was the exhibition of work by artists and architects organized in Belgrade in January 1938 under the patronage of Queen Mary Karađorđević, with the participation of three of the founders of the LEW—Alexandrina Cantacuzino, Františka Plamínková, and Leposava Petković.<sup>86</sup> According to a preserved catalog from that event, forty-five Bulgarian women artists participated. Together they presented 156 pieces of art.<sup>87</sup>

## Instead of a Conclusion

Did the connected and entangled activities of feminists and networks such as the LEW, the actions of Slavic and Balkan women, and the other international initiatives help women to gain more rights in the interwar Balkans? As already mentioned, when the LEW was created in Rome in 1923, no Southeastern European country allowed women the right to vote, despite the fact that their organizations had been struggling to obtain it since before World War I. Although the concept of “global sisterhood” has been compromised many times in history, as I have indicated here as regards the interwar Balkans, I argue that women’s joint (national, regional, and international) actions made a significant contribution to achieving, step by step, various elements of their national citizenship during different “rounds of national restructuring” of the “fraternal social contract.”<sup>88</sup> At the same time, it should be noted that women could not have gained civil and political citizenship without the support of some major male politicians. Male support for women’s rights (albeit slowly) manifested itself in many national, regional, and international settings throughout the modern world and should not be underestimated.<sup>89</sup> Still, without women’s own transnational initiatives and solidarity (problematic as they were in many cases), nothing would have changed.

What did women in the Balkans manage to do for themselves in the 1920s and 1930s? A few examples might be useful here. With the 1929 electoral reform, some of the Romanian female population gained the right to elect and be elected to local councils: those aged twenty-five or older who had secondary education or vocational training; civil servants; members of cultural and charity societies; war widows; and women with war decorations. At first six women city councilors were elected, among them three feminists—Calipso Botez,<sup>90</sup> Ella Negruzzi,<sup>91</sup> and Alexandrina Cancacuzino.<sup>92</sup>

In 1930 Greek women received limited rights to elect local authorities, restricted on the basis of age and education to no more than 10 percent of the Greek female population. They obtained full voting rights only in 1952.<sup>93</sup> Likewise, in 1930, Turkish women were granted the right to vote in local elections, and in 1934 they received the parliamentary vote. In 1935 eighteen Turkish women MPs—or 4.5 percent of MPs—entered the Great National Assembly.<sup>94</sup> As elsewhere, the political rights of women in Turkey during the 1930s could be seen as the result of various interrelated factors, such as the struggles of the local feminists; the influence of the large international women’s networks (such as the IWSA and the ICW); the global entanglements of the feminist



**Image 2.** Amsterdam meeting of the board of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship (IAWSEC), 8–10 May 1936. Second from the left is Dimitrana Ivanova, President of the BWU. Ivanova was a member of the board since its 1935 Istanbul congress (having been nominated by Avra Theodoropoulou). First on the left, next to Ivanova, is Margery Corbett Ashby—the President of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (IWSA) from 1923 to 1946. She was elected at the IWSA’s Rome congress when the LEW was established. Third from the right (seated, with glasses) is Dutch feminist Roza Manus.

Source: Bulgarian Historical Archive, at the SS. Cyril and Methodius National Library, Sofia, fond (archival collection) 584 (Dimitrana Ivanova).

agendas, especially in the role of the Istanbul congress of the IWSA, held in 1935; and, of course, the political views of the Kemalist government.<sup>95</sup>

In January 1937, Bulgaria passed a law granting women voting rights in local (communal) elections. Only legally married mothers could vote, and while voting was obligatory for male voters, it was optional for women. A new electoral law drafted after the restoration of the Bulgarian Constitution in late 1937 defined citizens as “all Bulgarian subjects, who have reached 21 years of age, men and women; the latter if married, divorced or widowed.” Taking into consideration the marriage pattern in the country—early and universal marriage—this meant that only a small segment of the female population was not enfranchised (unlike in the Romanian case). The new law, however, gave women only the active vote to elect, but not the passive vote to be elected.<sup>96</sup> The discriminatory treatment of women was clear: they were not considered equal citizens of the nation state, but treated as universal dependents of “the



citizens"—their husbands, present, former, or deceased. In 1938, a new Romanian Constitution introduced very limited women's voting rights for the two legislative bodies, the House and the Senate, and the first women MPs were elected. In 1939, Romania elected its first woman senator (the eugenicist Maria M. Pop).<sup>97</sup> Women in Yugoslavia participated in the first democratic elections during World War II, several years before full female suffrage was legally recognized under Tito's communist regime in 1945.<sup>98</sup>

Among the other achievements of the Southeastern European women's movements were, for example, the revisions of the civil codes in some of the countries and the acquisition of professional rights for some categories of highly educated women, such as women with an education in law. As Maria Bucur points out in her contribution to this Forum, in 1932 the Romanian civil code "lifted the legal incapacity of married women," and this was "the most change that took place in Romania during the interwar period on behalf of eliminating fundamental structural gender inequalities."<sup>99</sup> Greek women with law degrees gained the right to practice their profession in 1926; Yugoslav women in 1927; women in Turkey in 1928; and Romanian women in 1929. In Bulgaria and Albania female lawyers had no professional rights until 1944.<sup>100</sup> As in a number of other European states,<sup>101</sup> and although somewhat ambiguously in the (authoritarian) interwar Balkans, social benefits supporting some categories of mothers were introduced during the period under consideration.<sup>102</sup> It is quite sobering to see women's rights in some of the Balkan countries (Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Turkey) furthered during the 1920s and 1930s not by democratic parties and regimes, nor even by demagogic and opportunist interests, but by authoritarian leaders and governments.

More rights and freedoms—at least by law—were introduced in Southeastern European socialist states (Albania, Bulgaria, Romania, and Yugoslavia) after 1945. Although professional chances for women there improved and they were declared equal to men, deep-seated notions of women's difference survived the Cold War. Those notions, combined with a lack of gender sensitivity or a sense of gender inequality, are among the main obstacles today, as in the past, on the road to equity between women and men—political, social, and cultural.

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Bulgaria, 1878–1944) (2012; 2022); *Voices of Their Own: Oral History Interviews of Women* (2004); *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (author and coeditor with Francisca de Haan and Anna Loutfi, 2006); *Ot siankata na istoriata: Zhenite v bulgarskoto obshtestvo i kultura*, vol. 2, *Izvori za istoriata na zhenite: Dnevniitsi, spomeni, pisma, beletristika* (From the shadow of history: Women in Bulgarian society and culture, vol. 2, Sources for the history of women: Diaries, memoirs, correspondence, fiction) (coauthored and coedited with Georgeta Nazarska and Reneta Roshkeva, 2021). Email: daskalova@phls.uni-sofia.bg.

## ◆ Notes

1. On the “entangled history” and *histoire croisée* approaches, see Shalini Randeria, “Geteilte Geschichte und verwobene Moderne” [Divided history and interwoven modernity], in *Zukunftsentwürfe: Ideen für eine Kultur der Veränderung* [Future designs: Ideas for a culture of transformation], ed. Jörn Rüsen, Hanna Leitgeb, and Norbert Jegelka (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 1999), 87–96. While the first concept refers to the entanglements and “mutual constitution” of European colonial powers with their non-European territories, *histoire croisée* is used to examine intra-European transnational relations. See also: Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, “Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity,” *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (2006), 30–50. On the application of these approaches to women’s movements and feminisms, see Francisca de Haan, “Writing Inter/Transnational History: The Case of Women’s Movements and Feminisms,” in *Internationale Geschichte in Theorie und Praxis? International History in Theory and Practice. Sonderdruck*, ed. Barbara Haider-Wilson, William D. Godsey, and Wolfgang Mueller (Vienna: Verlag der Oesterreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2017), 501–536. See also my interview with De Haan, “Entangled Histories of Women’s Movements and Feminisms: An Interview with Francisca de Haan,” *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* 4, no. 2 (2020), 30, <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/8518>; and 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. Karen Offen, *European Feminisms: A Political History, 1700–1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 213–256.

3. Roxana Cheșchebec, “Feminist Ideologies and Activism in Romania (Approx. 1890s–1940s): Nationalism and Internationalism in Romanian Projects for Women’s Emancipation” (PhD thesis, History Department, Central European University, 2005); Francisca de Haan, Krassimira Daskalova, and Anna Loutfi, eds., *A Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe, 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2006); Krassimira Daskalova, “Women in the Balkans, 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> C.,” in *Oxford Encyclopaedia of Women's and Gender History*, vol. 1, ed. Bonnie Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 185–195; Krassimira Daskalova and Susan Zimmermann, “Gender History,” in *A Routledge History of East Central Europe*, ed. Irina Livezeanu and Arpad von Klimó (London: Routledge, 2017), 278–322; Jasmina Milanović, “Regionalna ženska udruženja—Mala Antanta žena i Jedinstvo slovenskih žena” [*Regional women's associations—Little Entente of Women and the unity of Slavic women*], in *Jugoslavija i Poljska u XX veku: Međunarodni tematski zbornik radova sa konferencije Jugoslovensko-poljski odnosi u XX veku* [Yugoslavia and Poland in the twentieth century: Proceedings of the international conference dedicated to Yugoslav–Polish relations during the twentieth century] (Belgrade: Institut za savremenu istoriju, Institut za istoriju i međunarodne odnose, Društvo istoričara Srbije “Stojan Novaković,” 2017), 19–40; Krassimira Daskalova, “Lit-

tle Entente of Women/Malkata Zhenska Antanta i feministkite dvizhenia na Balkanite prez 20-te i 30-te godini na XX vek" [Little Entente of Women and the feminist movements in the Balkans during the 1920s and 1930s], *Sotsiologicheski problemi* [Issues of sociology] 2 (2018), 675–695; Ida Ograjšek-Gorenjak and Marijana Kardum, "Mala ženska antanta (1923–1939): Mali savez s velikim ambicijama" [Little Entente of Women (1923–1939): Small union with big ambitions], *Historijski zbornik* [Historical collection] 72, no. 1 (2019), 111–138; Isidora Grubački, "The Emergence of the Yugoslav Interwar Liberal Feminist Movement and the Little Entente of Women: An Entangled History Approach," *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* 4, no. 2 (2020), 27, <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/8515>; Aslı Davaz, "An Annotated Archive of Entangled European Feminist History: The Union of Turkish Women, the Second Balkan Conference and Cécile Brunschvicg's Visit to Balkan Feminists (1923–1935)," *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics* 4, no. 2 (2020): 28, <https://doi.org/10.20897/femenc/8516>; Marijana Kardum, "Interwar Women's Movements from the Little Entente to Nationalism," in *The Routledge Handbook of Balkan and Southeast European History*, ed. John R. Lampe and Ulf Brunnbauer (London: Routledge, 2020).

4. Zheni Bozhilova-Pateva, "Po deinostta na Internatsionala" [About the work of the International], *Zhenski glas* [Women's voice] 20, no. 18 (10 June 1923), 1–3; Daskalova, "Women in the Balkans"; Daskalova, "Little Entente of Women."

5. Milena Atanacković, "Mala feministička Antanta, Liga za mir i slobodu: Rad delegatsia van programa Kongresa" [Feminist Little Entente, League for peace and freedom], *Ženski pokret* [Women's movement] 4, no. 6 (1923), 264–268. Atanacković writes that the Yugoslav delegation arrived in Rome with the idea for the new organization, which, according to the initial plans, had to unite all Slavic women. It is not clear how in Rome they decided to include Greece and Romania as well. Perhaps the reason is that none of the Balkan countries at the time granted women political rights.

6. *Ibid.*; Roxana Cheşchebec, however, writes that Theodoropoulou was elected to represent the LEW in the IWSA only at the Bucharest congress of the LEW in November 1923. See Cheşchebec, "Feminist Ideologies," 513.

7. Translation mine, from D. I-va, "Malka zhenska antanta" [Little Entente of Women], *Zhenski glas* 20, nos. 19–20 (15 July 1923), 3–4.

8. *Ibid.*; Cheşchebec, "Feminist Ideologies," 510.

9. Atanacković, "Mala feministička Antanta," 265.

10. Katarzyna Sierakowska, "Justyna Budzińska-Tylicka," in de Haan et al., *A Biographical Dictionary*, 82.

11. Susan Zimmermann, "The Challenge of Multinational Empire for the International Women's Movement: The Habsburg Monarchy and the Development of Feminist Inter/National Politics," *Journal of Women's History* 17 (2005), 87–117.

12. Bozhilova-Pateva, "Po deinostta na Internatsionala."

13. "Program rada Male Ženske Antante" [The program of the Little Entente of Women], *Ženski pokret*, 11 (15 July 1927), 1–2 (in Cyrillic script).

14. *Ibid.*

15. "Peace Programme of the Women's Little Entente," in *Jus Suffragii* [Right to suffrage] (August–September 1927), 148. Other documents of the LEW congresses also emphasized the necessity of creating a spirit of pacifism and peace, of favoring the teaching of culture and civilization over war in history classes, and of abolishing capital punishment.

16. Offen, *European Feminisms*, 19–26, esp. 21–22.

17. For more information about the history of women's organizations in Bulgaria, see Krassimira Daskalova, "Bulgarian Women's Movement (1850s–1940s)," in *Women's Movements: Networks and Debates in Post-Communist Countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, ed. Edith Sauer,

Margareth Lanzinger, and Elisabeth Frysak (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2006), 413–437; Krassimira Daskalova, “Women’s Suffrage in Bulgaria,” in *The Struggle for Female Suffrage in Europe: Voting to Become Citizens*, ed. Blanca Rodriguez-Ruiz and Ruth Rubio-Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 321–337.

18. Daskalova, “Bulgarian Women’s Movement (1850s–1940s),” 419.

19. Daskalova, “Women’s Suffrage in Bulgaria,” 328.

20. Daskalova, “Bulgarian Women’s Movement (1850s–1940s),” 424.

21. Theodora Dragostinova and David Gerlach, “Demography and Population Movements,” in *The Routledge History of East Central Europe since 1700*, ed. Irina Livezeanu and Arpad von Klimó (London: Routledge, 2017), 126–175, esp. 149–150.

22. Krassimira Daskalova, “Julia Malinova” and “Ana Karima,” in De Haan et al., *A Biographical Dictionary*, 235–240, 293–295.

23. The Women’s International Zionist Organization (WIZO) was established in 1920 in London. See Fay Grove-Pollak, *The Saga of a Movement: WIZO 1920–1970* (Tel Aviv: Department of Organization and Education of WIZO, 1970); Ofra Greenberg, “WIZO: Women’s International Zionist Organization (1920–1970),” *Jewish Women’s Archive*, <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/wizo-womens-international-zionist-organization-1920-1970> (accessed 20 April 2022). By the end of the 1930s Bulgarian “Jewish Women’s Committees” were established that united the existing Jewish women’s organizations in all towns. The WIZO officially ended in 1940, when Bulgaria joined the Nazis.

24. “Bulgaria: Report of the Bulgarian Women’s Rights, Prepared and Read by Jenny Bojilova-Dr. Pateff, Delegate,” in *Report of the Fourth Conference of the International Woman Suffrage Alliance* (Amsterdam, 1908), 87–90; “Histories of National Councils of Women: Bulgaria,” in International Council of Women, *Women in a Changing World: The Dynamic Story of the International Council of Women since 1888* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 260–261.

25. “Nova zhenska organizatsia” [A new women’s organization], *Zhenski glas* 17, no. 6 (18 September 1918), 2.

26. D. I., “Mezhdunarodnata zhenska liga za mir i svoboda” [International women’s league for peace and freedom], *Zhenski glas* 21, nos. 19–20 (20 July 1924), 4; D. Ivanova, “Bulgarskiat zhenski suiuz i mira” [Bulgarian women’s union and the peace], *Zhenski glas* 24, nos. 17–18 (25 May 1927), 6.

27. Bulgarian refugees from Macedonia came to Bulgaria after the two Balkan wars (1912–1913) and after World War I, together with other refugees from Thrace, Southern Dobrudzha, and the western borderlands (Tzaribrod, Bossilegrad, Trun, and Kula). Reparations and repeated earthquakes in April and May 1928 had devastating effects on the exhausted economy and everyday life of people in the 1920s and 1930s. C. A. Macartney, “V. The Bulgarian Settlement,” in *Refugees: The Work of the League* (London: League of Nations Union, 1931), 113–122.

28. Narodna Biblioteka Kiril i Metodii—Bulgarski Istoricheski Archiv (NBKM-BIA) [SS. Cyril and Methodius National Library—Bulgarian Historical Archive], fond (archival collection) 626 (Vassilka Kerteva); and Durzhaven Istoricheski Archiv—Sofia (DIA-Sofia) [State Historical Archive—Sofia], fond 832 (Ekaterina Karavelova). On Karavelova, see Reneta Roshkeva, “Ekaterina Karavelova,” in De Haan et al., *A Biographical Dictionary*, 230–234. See also Regine Bowden, *Ahead of Her Time* (Rousse: Primax, 2004); Fani Drenkova, ed., *Kato antichna tragediia: Sudbata na Ekaterina Karavelova i neinito semeistvo v pisma, dnevnitzi, fotografii* [An ancient tragedy: The life of Ekaterina Karavelova and her family in letters, diaries, pictures] (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1984).

29. D. I-va, “Malka zhenska antanta,” 3–4. On Dimitrana Ivanova, the president (1926–1944) of the BWU, the major feminist organization in Bulgaria, see Krassimira Daskalova, “The Women’s Movement in Bulgaria in a Life Story,” *Women’s History Review* 13, no. 1 (2004), 321–339.

30. The original statement in Serbian reads: “Bugarke nisu došle na kongres, a nisu poslale ni objašnjenje zbog čega ne dolaze.” See Milanović, “Regionalna ženska udruženja,” 21.

31. Wilson presented his “Fourteen Points” to the United States Congress on 8 January 1918. See the original content of his speech at [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/wilson14.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/wilson14.asp) (accessed 10 June 2022). Points 11 and 12 concerned the Balkan states especially.

32. Offen, *European Feminisms*, 213–249.

33. Zheni Bozhilova-Pateva, “Bulgarkite do Wilson: Edin apel za spravedlivost” [Bulgarian women to Wilson: An appeal for justice], *Utro* [Morning], 4 January 1919, 1. See also Krassimira Daskalova, “‘Grazhdankata’ Zheni Bozhilova-Pateva (1878–1955)—feministka na slovoto i na peroto, na ‘dobrotvorstvoto i na mirotvorstvoto’” [“The Citizen” Zheni Bozhilova-Pateva (1878–1955)—A feminist of the word and the feather, of ‘goodmaking and peacemaking’], in *Beati Possidentes: Yubileen sbornik, posveten na 60-godishninata na Prof. DHabil Borianana Hristova* [*Beati Possidentes: A collection dedicated to the sixtieth anniversary of Prof. DHabil Borianana Hristova*], ed. Antoaneta Totomanova and Tsvetanka Pancheva (Sofia: SS. Cyril and Methodius National Library, 2012), 445–459.

34. *Ibid.*, 445–459, esp. 452. For an older article about her in German, see Wolf Oschlies, “Ženi Božilova-Pateva (1878–1955): Leben und Werk der bulgarischen Volksbildnerin und Demokratin” [Zheni Bozhilova-Pateva (1878–1955): The life and work of a Bulgarian people’s educator and democrat], *Südosteuropa-Forschung* [Southeastern European research] 32 (1973), 192–210.

35. Ograjšek-Gorenjak and Kardum, “Mala ženska antanta (1923–1939),” 119.

36. “Bukureshtkiat kongres na Malkata Zhenska Antanta” [Bucharest congress of the Little Entente of Women], *Zhenski glas* 22, nos. 3–4 (15 November 1923), 8.

37. “Malkata Antanta na Zhenite dopulnia Malkata Antanta na muzhete” [Little Entente of Women complements the Little Entente of men], *Zhenski glas* 22, nos. 3–4 (15 November 1923), 8, originally published in *Vreme* [Time], 11 November 1923. See also “Žene male antante pocinju svoje delo” [Women of the Little Entente began their action], *Vreme*, 29 October 1924, 5; “Danase otvaria kongres Ženske Male Antante” [Today begins the congress of the Little Entente of Women], *Vreme*, 30 October 1924, 5.

38. “Bukureshtkiat kongres na Malkata Zhenska Antanta.”

39. Milena Atanacković, “IV Konferencija Male Ženske Antante” [The fourth congress of the Little Entente of Women], *Ženski pokret* 10 (15 June 1927), 1–2; “Program rada Male Ženske Antante” [The program of the Little Entente of Women], *Ženski pokret* 11 (15 July 1927), 1–2 (in Cyrillic script).

40. “Priznanie rada Male Ženske Antante” [Recognition of the deeds of the Little Entente of Women], *Ženski pokret* 16 (15 September 1927), 1–2.

41. See Maria Bucur’s article in this Forum (29).

42. Cheşchebec, “Feminist Ideologies,” 513.

43. “Mala ženska antanta” [Little Entente of Women], *Glasnik* 1–2 (January–February 1938), 1–3.

44. Mileva Petrović, “Da se razumemo!” [Let’s understand each other], *Ženski pokret* 20 (15 November 1927), 1.

45. D. Ivanova, “Do srubskite zheni” [To Serbian women], *Zhenski glas* 25, no. 7 (15 December 1927), 1–2.

46. Mileva Petrović, “Nase dodirne tacke” [Our common points], *Ženski pokret* 3 (1 February 1928), 1. The article was translated and published in Bulgarian in *Zhenski glas* 25, nos. 12–13 (1 March 1928), 1–2.

47. Petrović, “Nase dodirne tacke.”

48. D. Ivanova, “V otgovor na ‘Nashite dopirni tochki’” [In response to “Our common points”], *Zhenski glas* 25, nos. 12–13 (1 March 1928), 2.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid.

51. Prof. G. P. Genov, Prof. Ishirkov, D. Mishev, and Yanko Sakuzov.

52. "Vuprosi na denia: Pakt za vечно priatelstvo mezhdu Yugoslavia i Bulgaria" [Questions of the day: The agreement for eternal friendship between Yugoslavia and Bulgaria], *Zhenski glas* 34, nos. 7–8 (15 February 1937), 3.

53. See *Glasnik* 3 (3 March 1937); "Vuprosi na denia: Yugoslavianskite i nashite pridobivki" [Questions of the day: Yugoslav women and our achievements], *Zhenski glas* 34, no. 11 (5 May 1937), 3.

54. "Yugoslavianskiat zhenski suiuz pozdravliava bulgarskite zheni" [The Yugoslav women's union greets Bulgarian women], *Zhenski glas* 35, no. 3 (15 November 1937), 2.

55. For example, see Marilyn Boxer, "Rethinking the Socialist Construction and International Career of the Concept 'Bourgeois Feminism,'" *American Historical Review* 112, no. 1 (2007), 131–158; "The Source: The Tensions within the Early Twentieth-Century Bulgarian Women's Movement," intro. and trans. Krassimira Daskalova with Karen Offen, *Aspasia* 9 (2015), 113–125.

56. As detailed in Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

57. NBKM-BIA, f. 626 (Vassilka Kerteva).

58. Makedonskiat zhenski suiuz v Bulgaria (the Macedonian Women's Union in Bulgaria) was one of the two organizations that got in touch with the WILPF in 1919.

59. After reading Rupp's book, I asked her to provide more information about the documents on which she based her judgments. She sent me the two letters on which she built her conclusions. I have mentioned the first, written in French and signed by Karavelova and Kerteva. The second one—in German—is a draft of the response that the leaders of the WILPF sent to the Bulgarian activists. It clearly demonstrates a lack of understanding of Southeastern European political contexts and feminist actions, and does not show empathy with the positions of Bulgarian feminists. What are more striking to me, however, are the conclusions of Leila Rupp.

60. Roshkeva, "Ekaterina Karavelova," 234; Bowden, *Ahead of Her Time*; Drenkova, *Kato antichna tragedia*.

61. Offen, *European Feminisms*, 213–249, specific quotation on 213.

62. De Haan, "Writing Inter/Transnational History."

63. Cheschebec, "Feminist Ideologies," 516.

64. A metaphor used by Maria Bucur for another Eastern European feminist context.

65. NBKM-BIA, f. 584 (Dimitrana Ivanova), a. e. 623. See also Milanović, "Regionalna ženska udruženja."

66. NBKM-BIA, f. 584, a. e. 560, l. 291; D. Ivanova, "IV-i slavjanski zhenski subor v Praga" [Fourth Slavic women's meeting in Prague], *Zhenski vestnik* [Women's newspaper] 11390 (1938).

67. Both letters come from the Union of Slavic Women, with its main headquarters in Warsaw, to the BWU. The first one (dated 7 May 1931) is an invitation to the congress in Warsaw. The second letter (dated 22 May 1931) expresses the worry of the Polish activist, as she had not received an answer from the Bulgarian feminists. The correspondence makes it clear that the congress was planned for 10 June, and that the Statute and the program of the event were ready. The letter ends with the hope that "the Bulgarian colleagues" will send a message and attend the congress in June. NBKM-BIA, f. 584 (D. Ivanova), a. e. 623, l. 6, 8. I would like to thank Agnieszka Mrozik for translating the two letters from Polish for me.

68. NBKM-BIA, f. 584 (D. Ivanova), a. e. 623.

69. NBKM-BIA, f. 584, a. e. 560, l. 291; Ivanova, "IV-i slavjanski zhenski subor v Praga."

70. NBKM-BIA, f. 584 (D. Ivanova), a. e. 359.

71. See Davaz, "An Annotated Archive of Entangled European Feminist History," 4.
72. NBKM-BIA, f. 584 (D. Ivanova), a. e. 359, l. 1–5.
73. Ibid.
74. I am grateful to Katerina Dalakoura for providing additional information about the Greek women who participated in the Second Balkan Conference in Istanbul.
75. NBKM-BIA, f. 584 (D. Ivanova), a. e. 359, l. 6.
76. *IIème Conference Balkanique: Istanbul-Ankara, 19–26 October 1931* [The second Balkan conference: Istanbul-Ankara, 19–26 October 1931] (Istanbul: 1932).
77. "Zhenite ot tsial sviat iskat vseobshto razorazhenie: Aktsia na Mezhdunarodnata zhenska liga za mir i svoboda. Apel" [Women of the whole world want full disarmament], *Zhenski glas* 28, nos. 14–15 (20 March 1931), 1–2.
78. "Politika: Vuprosi na denia. Balkanska konferentsia" [Politics: Questions of the day], *Zhenski glas* 28, nos. 14–15 (20 March 1931), 2–3; Dimitrana Ivanova, "Mezhdunarodnata konferentsia za razoruzhenie i Balkanskata zhenska konferentsia v Belgrade (17–20 mai 1931)" [The international conference for disarmament and the Balkan women's conference in Belgrade], *Zhenski glas* 28, nos. 17–18 (31 May 1931), 1–3.
79. Davaz, "An Annotated Archive of Entangled European Feminist History," 5.
80. Cheşchebec, "Feminist Ideologies," 533.
81. "Nashite skupi gosti or Rumunia" [Our dear friends from Romania], *Zhenski glas* 31, nos. 8–9 (15 March 1934), 8.
82. "Pravata na rumunskite zheni po novata konstitutsia" [The rights of Romanian women according to the new constitution], *Zhenski glas* 35, nos. 8–9 (20 March 1938), 3.
83. "Iz vlechenie ot protokolite na 32 kongress na Bulgarskia zhenski suiuz: 25, 26 i 27 September 1938 g.-Rousse" [From the minutes of the thirty-second congress of the Bulgarian Women's Union: 25, 26 and 27 September 1938—Rousse], *Zhenski glas* 36, nos. 1–2 (1 November 1938), 4–8; nos. 3–4 (1 December 1938), 4–6.
84. According to Atanasković this happened in 1934: Milena Atanasković, "Mala zenska antanta" [Little Entente of Women], *Glasnik Jugoslavenskog zenskog saveza* [The herald of the Yugoslav women's union] 4, nos. 1–2 (1938), 1–2.
85. Milanović, "Regionalna ženska udruženja," 21.
86. "Iz vlechenie ot protokolite na 32 kongress na Bulgarskia zhenski suiuz," *Zhenski glas* 36, nos. 1–2 (1 November 1938), 4–8; nos. 3–4 (1 December 1938), 4–6.
87. Irina Genova and Ljubinka Stoilova, *Presences/Absences: Women Artists and Architects in the Modern Art of Bulgaria* (Sofia: Sofia Art Gallery, 2006), 11.
88. Carol Pateman, "The Fraternal Social Contract," in *The Disorder of Women*, ed. Carol Pateman (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), 33–57.
89. Daskalova, "Women's Suffrage in Bulgaria," 321–337.
90. See Maria Bucur, "Calypso Botez," in De Haan et al., *A Biographical Dictionary*, 76–79.
91. Maria Bucur, "Ella Negruzzi," in De Haan et al., *A Biographical Dictionary*, 363–365.
92. Roxana Cheşchebec, "The Achievement of Female Suffrage in Romania," in *The Struggle for Female Suffrage in Europe: Voting to Become Citizens*, ed. Blanca Rodriguez-Ruiz and Ruth Rubio-Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 357–372.
93. Efi Avdela, "Between Duties and Rights: Gender and Citizenship in Greece, 1864–1953," in *Citizenship and the Nation-State in Greece and Turkey*, ed. Faruk Birtek and Talia Dragonas (London: Routledge, 2005); Demetra Samiou, "So Difficult to be Considered Citizens: The History of Women's Suffrage in Greece, 1864–2001," in *The Struggle for Female Suffrage in Europe: Voting to Become Citizens*, ed. Blanca Rodriguez-Ruiz and Ruth Rubio-Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 439–451.
94. In 1939 there were fifteen women MPs, i.e., 3.5 percent; in 1943, sixteen women MPs, i.e., again 3.5 percent; in 1946, nine women MPs, i.e., 2 percent; and in 1950, three women, i.e.,

0.6 percent. See Denise Kandiyoti, "Identity and Its Discontents: Women and Nation," *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 20, no. 3 (1991), 429–443; Denise Kandiyoti, "From Empire to Nation State: Transformations of the Woman Question in Turkey," in *Retrieving Women's History: Changing Perceptions of the Role of Women in Politics and Society*, ed. J. Kleinberg (Paris: UNESCO Press, 1992), 219–240.

95. The other big issue, which is beyond the scope of this article, is the tensions between Kemalist women's activists and other, non-Kemalist feminists in Turkey, who did not see Kemalists as feminists. In fact, this concerns "state feminism," so widely discussed and relevant to many contexts around the world during the twentieth century.

96. Daskalova, "The Women's Movement in Bulgaria in a Life Story," 97; Daskalova, "Women's Suffrage in Bulgaria."

97. Daskalova, "Women in the Balkans, 19<sup>th</sup>–20<sup>th</sup> C.," 192; Cheşchebec, "The Achievement of Female Suffrage in Romania," 368.

98. Irena Selesnik, "Female Suffrage in Slovenia," in *The Struggle for Female Suffrage in Europe: Voting to Become Citizens*, ed. Blanca Rodriguez-Ruiz and Ruth Rubio-Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 339–372.

99. See Maria Bucur's article here, p. 27.

100. See Gordana Stojaković, "The First Lawyers and Attorneys: The Struggle for Professional Recognition of Women's Rights in Yugoslavia (1918–1953)," in *New Perspectives on European Women's Legal History*, ed. Sara L. Kimble and Marion Roewekamp (New York: Routledge, 2017), 174–197; Krassimira Daskalova, "Bulgarian Women in Legal Education and the Legal Profession during the First Half of the Twentieth Century," in *New Perspectives on European Women's Legal History*, ed. Sara L. Kimble and Marion Roewekamp (New York: Routledge, 2017), 198–216, esp. 214–215.

101. The French legislature, for example, passed a complex program of family allowances in 1939. Most state subsidies, however, were given to fathers, while mothers got financial support only if they did not work outside the household. Ann Taylor Allen, *Women in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 37.

102. Maria Bucur, "In the Praise of Wellborn Mothers: On the Development of Eugenicist Gender Roles in Interwar Romania," *East European Politics and Societies* 9, no. 1 (Winter 1995), 123–142; Maria Bucur, *Eugenics and Modernization in Interwar Romania* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2002); Svetla Baloutsova, *Demography and Nation: Social Legislation and Popular Policy in Bulgaria, 1918–1944* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2010).