

PONOVNO OVREDNOTENJE STATUSA VETERANOV V POSTKOMUNISTIČNIH DRUŽBAH – PRIMER ROMUNIJE

THE REAPPRAISAL OF VETERANS' STATUS IN POST-COMMUNIST SOCIETIES - ROMANIA'S CASE

Povzetek Status vojnih veteranov v Romuniji je v vsem obdobju komunizma veljal kot občutljivo in zapleteno vprašanje, kar je treba pripisati svojski angažiranosti vojske med drugo svetovno vojno, ko se je Romunija kot zaveznica Nemčije med letoma 1941 in 1944 obrnila proti Sovjetski zvezi. Geopolitična stvarnost povojnega obdobja je Romunijo pahnila na sovjetsko vplivno območje, s čimer se je v komunističnem režimu oblikoval tudi način obravnave statusa veteranov, ki so se borili proti sovjetski zaveznici, in sicer tako, da jim je odrekel posebne pravice in privilegije. S spremembo političnega sistema po koncu hladne vojne je bil status veteranov ponovno ovrednoten in postavljena sta bila tudi temelj za obsežne spremembe nacionalne zakonodaje ter predvsem opredelitev vloge veteranov v družbi. Z novimi obveznostmi, ki jih je Romunija prevzela na mednarodnih vojaških misijah in v operacijah pod vodstvom Nata, EU in OZN, se je po letu 1990 oblikovala nova kategorija veteranov. Čeprav se njihov status normalizira, še naprej ostaja predmet razprav.

Ključne besede *Veteran, vojna, združenje, status, zakonodaja.*

Abstract The status of war veterans in Romania was regarded as a sensitive and complex issue throughout the Communist period. This was due to the particularities of the military involvement during the Second World War, when Romania joined Germany against the Soviet Union between 1941 and 1944. The geopolitical realities which emerged after the war pushed Romania within the Soviet sphere of influence, and this was to shape the way in which the Communist regime approached the status of the veterans who fought against the Soviet ally, by denying them specific rights or privileges. With the change of the political system following the end of the Cold War, the status of the veterans was re-evaluated, settling the ground for broad changes with regard to national legislation and, in particular, the role played by the veterans in society. After 1990, a new category of veterans was established, given the new

responsibilities assumed by Romania as part of the international military missions and operations under the lead of NATO, the EU and UN. Although the status of veterans in Romania has normalized since 1990, this remains a dossier which needs to be further considered.

Key words *Veteran, war, association, status, legislation.*

Introduction With the end of the Communist regime in Romania, the transition towards democracy led to important changes which allowed the state and society to develop a new transformative path and to introduce innovative reforms which covered all sectors and fields of activities. Within this new emerging political and social setting, we integrated changes in the national legislation regulating veterans' status which resulted in the establishment of a new perspective based on inclusiveness and broad representations of the Romanian veterans.

The following paper seeks to decipher the main dynamics which characterized the evolution of veterans' status in Romania, the historical particularities, and the specific developments which emerged against the background of the power shift of 1989. In analyzing the status of the veterans following the collapse of the Communist regime in Romania, two important aspects need to be considered. The first concerns the veterans from the Second World War whose rights were not recognized during Communist times. The second considers the veterans who participated in the post-Cold War military missions and operations in the war theatres of the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq. There are specific differences between the two categories of veterans but, nevertheless, both represent an integral part of the national historical culture, which explains the special role of veterans in society and the broad support provided by the state in order to keep their memory alive and, in case of veterans after 1990, to help them re-integrate into society.

1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In a brief historical perspective, the term of war veteran was first introduced in Romania on April 29, 1902, through a royal high decree adopted by King Carol I. At that time, the status of veteran referred to those fighting in the war of independence of 1877, and was regarded as a tribute and recognition of the merits of the men "who were willing to sacrifice their lives for their country". The war of independence was the war fought by Romania against the Ottoman Empire as part of the larger conflict which opposed Russia and the Ottoman Empire known as the Russian-Turkish War (1877-1878). Romania fought on the Russian side, and the defeat of the Ottomans allowed Romania to gain its independence from the Ottoman Empire. This was officially recognized by the Congress of Berlin in 1878.

According to the existing records, troop mobilization for the war reached over 100,000, of which the operative army contained 1,062 officers and 57,638 military

personnel. The army of operations which was engaged in the war had about 38,000 military personnel. The casualties of the Romanian army included 4,287 deaths (40 officers and 4,247 NCOs and soldiers) and 3,316 injured (70 officers and 3,246 NCOs and soldiers) (Scafeset al, 2002). In Article 2 of the royal decree, it was stated that: “each veteran soldier shall be provided with peace and position for the rest of his life, and shall receive all he needs for this purpose as a stimulus for future generations”. At that time, the status of veterans had rather a symbolic character and it remained mostly a vague concept, due to the lack of specific measures to generate practical support for those fighting in the war. The documentary evidence regarding the veterans of the war of independence are mostly missing from the historical literature, and this is another reason explaining the narrow research focus on this specific matter. However, one can notice that the veterans were not established as a significant force; they had no significant role in society; and they lacked any form of coordination or the ability to forge a specific framework of cooperation.

1.1 War veterans in the First World War

It was not until the First World War that war veterans gained a special relevance at the level of public and political debate¹. In order to understand the situation of the war veterans, it is important to explain the broader context of Romania's engagement in the First World War. The outbreak of war found Romania in a complicated geopolitical position. Due to the agreement signed in 1883 by King Carol I, of the German House of Hohenzollern, Romania was part of the Triple Alliance, and therefore was expected to fight alongside Germany and Austro-Hungary. Nevertheless, most of the political elite and public opinion were in favor of joining the Triple Entente and wanted to engage in the war alongside France and Great Britain. This complicated domestic equation forced King Carol I to accept the decision taken during the Crown Council held on August 3, 1914 to endorse the decision of neutrality (Torey, 2012, p. 18). At the core of Romania's decision of neutrality was the special dossier of the Romanian territories from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in particular the region of Transylvania with its mainly Romanian population. According to the views shared by the majority of the political elite, regaining the Romanian lost territories, at that time held by the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was assumed as the main national priority, and this was to become the engine driving Bucharest's agenda towards the two opposing European military alliances. In order to secure Romania joining the war against the Central Powers, the Entente made significant territorial concessions to Romania following complicated negotiations between 1914 and 1916. An important episode which influenced Romania's position took place on October 1, 1914 when the Russian-Romanian secret agreement was concluded; the so-called Sazonov-Diamandi Convention. According to this document, Saint Petersburg committed to defending Romania's territorial integrity and recognizing its claims to Romanian territories held by the Dual Monarchy (Oprea, 1998, p. 73; Ceausescu, 1988, p. 340; Iordache, 1972, p. 329). Having secured the necessary support for its territorial

¹ We include in the category of veterans those fighting in the war as well as the “invalids” of war and the descendants of the deceased.

claims, Romania signed the military convention and the political treaty with the Entente powers – France, Great Britain, Russia and Italy – on August 17, 1916, and entered the war against the Habsburg Monarchy. On the night of 24/25 August, 1916, the Romanian Armed Forces launched an ample military offensive along the Carpathians, crossing the border of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The outcome of the war, which ended with the defeat of the Central Powers and the profound reshaping of the European map following the disintegration of the historical empires (Austro-Hungary, Russia, and the Ottoman Empire), allowed Romania to fulfil its national aspiration of territorial unification by bringing the Romanian provinces – Transylvania, Bukovina and Bessarabia – back to the homeland.

The impact of the war was felt deeply at all levels of society and had tremendous effects on the country's internal dynamics. Within this configuration the issue of the veterans gained a special relevance, which can be deciphered as part of a broader analysis. Two dimensions are particularly important to explain the dynamic of this dossier. The first was connected to a trend which emerged in many European countries which mobilized vast human resources to fight in the war; the former combatants became an active force lobbying for greater financial benefits and a form of recognition, leading to the creation of various organizations and associations of veterans. This was to become an important model, shaping the agenda of the actions of the veterans in Romania. The second dimension concerned the level of human mobilization and the great casualties suffered by the Romanian army during the war. The figures are especially revealing: in August 1916, of the 8,000,000 inhabitants of Romania, 813,758 people were mobilized, with another 416,000 reserves that could be called up. This was 30% of the total male population (Torrey, 2012, p. 29; Kiritescu, 1922, p. 109). By the end of the war, an estimated 220,000 military personnel had been killed or were missing in action (2,330 officers and 217,016 soldiers). This made up 3% of the country's population (Kiritescu, 1989, p. 497). The number of "invalids", officially reported, accounted for 35,717 military, while the number of war widows was 55,906. The estimated number of orphans was 48,445, and of them 9,365 were sheltered by the state within special institutions (94 orphanages and 11 sanatoriums which belonged to the Society "The Protection of War Orphans") and another 565 were accommodated in facilities provided by other institutions (Kiritescu, 1989, p. 497). Against this background, it was obvious that the issue of the veterans could not be ignored, and this was to define the way the veterans behaved, public attitudes, and the political reactions to the problem.

In analyzing the veterans' issue, there is another important factor which needs to be considered. As the result of the war, the Romanian borders were significantly extended, so that in 1920 the Romanian state was more than twice the size it had been in 1914. This new reality raised several important questions regarding the status of the Romanian military who were mobilized to fight in the Austro-Hungarian and Russian armies; the re-integration of the former combatants from the new territories which were incorporated by the Romanian state; and the status of the military of non-Romanian origin who chose not to leave Romanian territory after the war ended

and the new territorial borders had been established. It is important to mention that the Romanian state provided equal treatment and recognition to all men and women in uniform who fought in the war, regardless of the particular army that they had had to serve (Romanian, Austro-Hungarian or Russian).

Against this background, the Romanian state had to deal with multiple challenges: to re-integrate the former combatants; to take care of the “invalids” and of the families of those who lost their lives; and to generate a legal framework for regulating their rights and benefits while adjusting to civilian life. An important measure taken during the war, which was announced by King Ferdinand in 1917 when the Romanian Armed Forces were struggling to counter the military offensive of the Central Powers, was to promise land to the peasants who enrolled in the army. This decision grounded the first major agrarian reform, which was officially approved in 1921 (Axenciuc, 1996). This decision taken by King Ferdinand was doubly motivated: on the one hand, it was a way to recompense the soldiers and their families for their sacrifices during the war, and, on the other hand, it aimed to prevent the spread of revolution, which became a serious matter of concern under the influence of the dramatic events in Russia which toppled Russia's Tsar (February Revolution of 1917).

Also, as a sign of recognition of the merits of the military during the war, King Ferdinand introduced, on September 26, 1916, the highest military decoration granted to the officers who distinguished themselves in battles, named Order “Michael the Brave”. Those who were honoured with this distinction were granted special privileges and benefits. The special law adopted on May 12, 1927, endorsed specific material rights to the officers who have received the Order “Mihai the Brave”, such as 25 hectares of land, a house lot of 500 square metres and other particular benefits.

Although the war veterans became an important object of public and political interest, their practical role had rather mixed results. Their re-integration into civilian life proved more difficult than expected, while the economic downturn of the late 1920s imposed further setbacks with regard to the state's ability to provide the expected care and other benefits. Despite the fact that the war veterans became an importance force in Romanian society at that time, which they could use in order to enhance their role and national profile, they did not generate a powerful platform of action in order to project their voice based on an articulated agenda of objectives. As a consequence, in the inter-war period, we see the emergence of numerous associations, groups or other initiatives created by the veterans, also including the “invalids” and the descendants of the deceased. Such examples include: The Association “Scouts from the War of 1916-1919”, the Veterans' Association “Maresti”, The Society “The Tombs of the Heroes Dead in the War”, etc. Some of them succeeded in getting an international profile by joining other European, especially French, associations, and becoming part of the broad European community focused on protecting the rights of the veterans. However, the veterans did not establish a broad, nationwide association, as they remained rather attached to their own groupings with specific interests according to the character of the association that they belonged to.

1.2. War veterans in the Second World War

The Second World War brought structural changes regarding the veterans' status, which consequently led to a broad reconsideration of the legal framework regulating the veterans' issue. The new legislation, introduced by the Communist regime after 1945, had a large discriminatory character. This was a consequence of Romania's history of engagement in the Second World War, as Romania switched its alliance from fighting against the USSR to joining it as an ally.

It should be mentioned that during the inter-war period Romania was part of the system of alliances built by France as a counterweight to both USSR and Germany, which was also aimed at preventing a possible German-Soviet entente. The disintegration of the regional security arrangements, starting with September 1938 (the Munich Agreement), the rise of Germany, the fear of the Soviet Union, and the defeat of France in June 1940, forced the Bucharest leadership to re-assess its alignment strategy and seek accommodation with Nazi Germany. Within this new geopolitical architecture, Romania signed, on September 27, 1940, the Tripartite Pact, officially allying itself with Germany, Italy, and Japan (Hillgruber, 1994). When Germany launched Operation "Barbarossa" on June 22, 1941, invading the Soviet Union, Romania, under the lead of Marshal Ion Antonescu, the ruler of Romania (*Conducator*), joined the German forces. The war engagement alongside Germany and against the Soviet Union allowed Romania to recuperate the lost territories of Bessarabia and Bukovina which were occupied by the Soviets in June 1940 (based on the provisions enlisted in the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of August 23, 1939). Following the liberation of the Romanian provinces (July 1941), Ion Antonescu decided to continue alongside Germany and continue the military offensive towards the East, so that the Romanian army participated in the extensive military operations in Odessa, Crimea, south of Kharkov, Stalingrad and further south in Kuban and Caucasus (Dutu et al, 1999, pp. 8-9).

The change of military dynamics starting at the end of 1942, the successive defeats of Germany and the advance of the Soviet Union accelerated Bucharest's efforts to seek strategic alternatives. The climax was reached on August 23, 1944, when Ion Antonescu was removed from power. Romania broke with Nazi Germany and joined the Coalition of United Nations, fighting on its side until the end of the hostilities on May 9, 1945. Despite its military contribution to the Allied war effort, the Peace Treaty signed on February 10, 1947 did not recognize the co-belligerent status of Romania. Moreover, the new geopolitical setting, agreed at the end of the war between the great victorious powers, left Romania under the Soviet sphere of influence, a reality which settled its overall political and military configuration throughout the Cold War period.

The military engagement in the Second World War was to clearly define the status of the war veterans in Romania. As already mentioned, Romania's war engagement was split into two phases: the Eastern campaign which lasted from June 22, 1941 till August 23, 1944, when the Romanian army fought against the Soviet Union as

an ally of Nazi Germany; and the Western campaign from August 23, 1944 to May 9, 1945 when it joined the United Nations forces against Germany. This was to be a major factor in shaping the overall Communist position and policy towards the war veterans in Romania. According to the estimated data, Romania fielded over 2.5 million troops in the Eastern campaign, on a rotational basis, and 553,121 on the Western front. During the Eastern campaign, Romania lost 624,740 military (71,585 deaths, 243,622 wounded, 309,533 missing in action), while during the Western campaign, the losses reached 169,822 military (deaths, wounded and missing in action) (Dutu et al, 1999, p. 8; Rotaru, 1995, p. 197).

The official approach towards the war veterans cannot be separated from the political developments which emerged in Romania with the Communist takeover of power in December 1947 (the first Communist government was formed as early as March 6, 1945). Under close supervision from Moscow, the Romanian Communist regime launched an extensive process of re-shaping not only the country's political orientations and military doctrines, but also integrating a broad range of practices, ideological patterns and typology of behavior imposed by the Soviet Union. Under these new circumstances, the war against the Soviet Union was considered a major act of aggression and all those found guilty were to be held accountable.

The veterans' issue was settled based on Law Decree no. 440 of June 4, 1945, which granted the status of veteran to those who had fought in the wars of 1913, 1916-1919 and 1941-1945. **The new law introduced a major distinction between those engaged on the Western front, who were granted the status of veteran, and those fighting on the Eastern front, who were denied any official recognition as war veterans.**

The Romanian military who fought in the Eastern campaign were subjected to a regime of discrimination, and this policy was also applied to those detained in the Soviet camps as prisoners of war. As stated by the documentary evidence, on April 28, 1956 there were still 187,367 Romanian military held prisoner in the Soviet Union (6 generals, 5,697 officers, 181,664 NCOs and soldiers) (Varatic, 2013: xxi). According to the Soviet archives, 132,755 prisoners were released and repatriated, and 54,602 persons were reported dead (Varatic, 2013, p. xxi). They were excluded from any official recognition and most of them were subject to retaliatory measures once they were brought back home.

The Communist regime conducted an oppressive policy against high ranking officers who had fought on the Eastern front. These were treated as war enemies due to their role in the military campaign against the USSR. According to the known figures, between 1944 and 1961, out of over 100 imprisoned generals, 43 lost their lives. A high number of low-ranking officers had a similar fate.

In October 1963, the Committee of Former Fighters and War Veterans against Fascism was created, under strict Communist Party supervision. Participation in this

Committee was only permitted to those who had fought in the Western campaign, alongside the forces of the United Nations including the Soviet Union. The term veteran was in practice where placed with that of anti-fascist fighter, so only those who were engaged in the campaign against Germany were granted recognition for their roles in the war and accepted as veterans. Unlike the military engaged in the Eastern campaign, who were excluded from the category of veterans, this status was granted to the volunteers who had joined the “Tudor Vladimirescu-Debrețin” Division and the “Horea, Closca and Crisan” Division. Both were military units created in the territory of the Soviet Union, starting in 1943, which included Romanian prisoners of war. Both Soviet-made divisions joined the Red Army and once they entered Romania played a significant role in bringing the Communist regiment power. The decision to recognize them as war veterans became a matter of debate after 1990, due to their controversial role in the post-war regime change dynamics.

Nevertheless, during Communist times, veterans did not benefit from any special or particular state support or other privileges, having rather a low profile in society. A possible explanation rests with the fact that the Romanian military participation in the Second World War remained a contentious issue, due to the position towards the USSR and the controversies generated by Romania’s engagement in the Eastern campaign.

2 CHANGES EMERGING AFTER 1990

The restrictions imposed by the Communist regime defined the overall veterans’ dossier after 1990. The major priority was to generate a new legal framework to allow a more comprehensive approach, aimed at reconsidering the conditions and criteria for granting the status of veteran, including the “invalids” and the descendants of the deceased.

The new law regulating veteran status was adopted on July 1, 1994, namely Law No. 44 concerning war veterans, and the rights of the “invalids” and war widows². The major innovation introduced by the new law was the embracing of a comprehensive and inclusive approach regarding the veterans. In this regard, according to Article 1, veteran status was equally granted to all those who participated in the First and Second World Wars, including “invalids” and war prisoners. Three major categories were to be considered:

- Romanian citizens who had enrolled on a voluntary basis and fought alongside the forces of the United Nations;
- The inhabitants of the Romanian provinces temporarily occupied between 1940-1945 and who were incorporated or mobilized compulsorily and fought in the armies of other states, if they kept or regained their Romanian citizenship;

² Law no. 44 of July 1, 1994, republished in *Official Monitor of Romania, Part. I, no. 783 of October 22, 2002*

- Those of German citizenship who were included compulsorily in units of the German army if they kept or re-gained their Romanian citizenship and residence in Romania.

An important dimension of the new law regarded the rights and benefits recognized to all the veterans, “invalids” and widows of veterans. The benefits were granted based on different criteria (military rank, military decorations received, the period that they were engaged in war). On October 10, 2007, Government Decision No. 1222 introduced War Veteran Day, which is celebrated each year on April 29.

Immediately after the collapse of the Communist regime, important changes were introduced with regard to the organizational framework of the veterans. On December 27, 1989 the National Association of War Veterans (NAWV) was created, which replaced the previous Committee of Former Fighters and War Veterans against Fascism. This is the most representative association of Romanian veterans and is recognized as the most influential and high profile institution in the field. After 1990, it played an important role in promoting war veterans in society and re-opening the veterans' dossier as a distinctive matter of interest at the political level. The Association was founded, and led ever since, by General (Ret.) Marin Dragnea, and it includes all Romanian veterans from the Second World War without discrimination. According to its legal status, the NAWV is an independent non-governmental organization, with no political affiliation. In the last 26 years, other smaller associations of veterans have joined it, a dynamic which has greatly increased the role and prestige of the NAWV. The fact that it is largely supported by the Ministry of National Defence is another important factor which contributed to the enhancement of its visibility at the national level. The NAWV developed a broad international network of relations with veterans associations from Russia, the USA, Great Britain, France, Germany, Poland and Ukraine, among others³.

With regard to membership, it should be mentioned that when it was founded, the NAWV had around 900,000 members (veterans, “invalids”, widows of veterans, and war widows). Currently, the association numbers approximately 130,000 members, of which about 14,666 are veterans and war “invalids”, 521 war widows, and 86,908 widows of war veterans⁴.

The major changes introduced following the end of the Communist regime did not manage to end some historical controversies which emerged among the veterans. The main issue in dispute regarded the rights granted as veterans to those who joined the two Soviet-made Divisions – “Tudor Vladimirescu-Debretin” and “Horea, Closca and Crisan”. One example of this is the National Union of War Veterans and their Descendants, which argued for the need to deny the status of war veteran to the

³ According to documentary material provided to the author by the National Association for War Veterans in Romania

⁴ According to the records of the National House of Pensions; relevant information contained in documentary material provided to the author by the National Association for War Veterans in Romania

members of the two divisions on legitimacy grounds. However, this kind of narrative does not have a real impact over the general dynamic concerning the issue of the veterans in Romania, since any distinction between different categories of veterans was excluded from the existing legal provisions.

There is also another category of veterans, called anti-fascist veterans, who were excluded through Law 44/1994 regulating the status of war veterans in Romania. On May 31, 2003, the Parliament adopted a legislative initiative concerning the rights of the anti-fascist combatants. They are represented by the Anti-Fascist Association whose National Committee has the right to grant the status of anti-fascist veteran. Currently, this Association has around 800 members. The rights of the anti-fascist veterans are similar to those of the war veterans, with the exception of their status as military.

Since 1990, the war veterans have been granted specific rights and material benefits in terms of financial contributions, healthcare, tax exemptions, free public transport, and so on. What is especially important is the fact that the war veterans enjoy a wider national respect and are honoured for their sacrifice and military virtues, as they are now recognized as having played an important role in preserving the national historical memory and in shaping the collective military culture.

3 THE POST-1990 VETERANS

In analyzing the issue of veteran status, it is important to mention that after 1990 a new category of veterans took shape. This includes the military who were engaged in the theatres of operations after 1990. Romania's military participation answered to certain specific strategic objectives as part of its allied obligations and commitments to contribute to the overall efforts of providing security and stability within and outside the Euro-Atlantic area. During the first 10 years of NATO membership, Romania participated in operations in the Western Balkans, Afghanistan, Iraq and North Africa, under the aegis of NATO, the EU, the alliance with the USA (the "coalition of the willing") and other international organizations. The Romanian military presence consisted of 40,000 soldiers rotated in these theatres of operations⁵. For example, in Iraq, over 8,400 military personnel were engaged from 2003 to 2009, and in Afghanistan over 25,000. Twenty-five military personnel lost their lives and over 140 were injured and disabled, the major losses being in Afghanistan.

The increasing number of former combatants in recent international operations has raised the issue of recognizing their merits and the need to establish a legal framework to regulate their status and role in society. Emergency decree No. 82/2006⁶ adopted by the Romanian Government represents the first legal document which settled this

⁵ *Romania Defense 2014, Ministry of National Defense: 1*, http://www.mapn.ro/publicatii/2014/defence_2014.pdf, accessed on 7 June 2016

⁶ *Published in the Official Monitor of Romania, No. 896 of November 3, 2016*

issue. Its implementation procedures were further developed and integrated through Decree No. M39 of 27 March 2009⁷ and Decree No. M72 of 5 July 2010, adopted by the Minister of National Defence.

Emergency decree No. 82/2006 establishes the procedures for the recognition of the merits of the military personnel participating in military operations, including ways of granting distinctions and providing job opportunities. The Ministry of National Defence plays an important role in this regard by providing support to the “invalids” in finding jobs within various military structures which fit their physical and medical condition.

With regard to the status of veterans, there are two major criteria to be considered:

- Article 3: army personnel who have served in military operations, starting in 1990, for at least 12 months, continuous and cumulative, as well as the disabled personnel, regardless of the duration of their participation in military actions, is granted the honorific title of “Military Veteran”; civilian personnel are granted the honorific title of “Veteran”⁸.
- Article 4: military personnel who have served in military operations, starting in 1990, regardless of the duration, and who distinguished themselves during the mission by special manifestations of courage and loyalty, will be granted the honorific title of “Military Veteran”, and for civilians, the title of “Veteran”.

According to Article 2, military missions are considered as follows:

- missions conducted by the forces engaged in “fighting service”;
- training exercises, performed on the ground, with or without fight shooting;
- support actions for helping civilian authorities in emergency situations;
- humanitarian assistance missions⁹.

Compared with the status of war veterans, which regards the former combatants from the Second World War, the status of “Military Veteran” does not imply granting rights and benefits, but is rather a symbolic recognition of their military contribution and effort. The exception regards the invalids and those who suffered injuries, who receive consistent material support and other benefits (free public transportation, the exemption from particular state contributions, 12 free trips by rail and waterway, etc.). In 2015 it was established that the date of 11 November will be celebrated as the National Day of Veterans.

In 2013, the Association of Military Veterans and Disabled Veterans was founded, whose agenda is especially focused on helping veterans with social and medical

⁷ Published in the Official Monitor of Romania, part I, No. 237 of 9 April 2009

⁸ Decree regarding the modification and completion of the application of the methodological norms adopted through Emergency Decree No. 82/2006 for recognizing the merits of the military personnel participating in military actions and for granting them some rights, as well as for the descendants of the deceased, adopted through the Decree of the Minister of National Defence No. M39/2009

⁹ *Ibid*

problems. In the long term, its goal is to create a Medical Recuperation Centre for providing support and medical assistance to disabled veterans who were engaged in the military theatres after 1990.

Conclusion The topic of war veterans has not been the subject of systemic research in Romania, and this makes a comprehensive investigation on the issue difficult. The rationales may be found in the lack of interest, poor documentary evidence or political constraints as happened during Communist times. With the change of the political regime after 1990, significant changes were introduced with regard to the way in which war veterans are acknowledged as an important national symbol and part of the historical collective memory. Nevertheless, this growing attention and reconsideration did not produce substantial historical research, which remains rather limited or confined to particular cases based on individual experiences and particular accounts.

It is obvious that the end of the Communist regime allowed a broad re-assessment of the role of war veterans in society. From this perspective, it should be mentioned that the Ministry of National Defence conducts various activities aimed at honouring the war veterans and providing them with support and recognition. A series of institutions were also established, with specific goals of coordinating and organizing activities related to war veterans, which work under the aegis of the Ministry of National Defence (the National Office of Heroes Memory, established in 2003, and the Direction of Personnel Welfare, created in 2009).

The major innovations introduced after 1990 with regard to the status of war veteran can be also seen as an attempt to repair the injustice done during the Communist regime, when most of them were denied any rights or official recognition. The new legislation which regulates the status of the war veterans has excluded any distinction between those who fought during the Second World War, and allowed their integration regardless of the nature or character of their military engagement throughout the war.

The new category of veterans which emerged after 1990 required a distinctive type of analysis. In this specific case, the research reveals the need for greater support in meeting the veterans' needs, especially in terms of health and healthcare (both physical and mental health), reintegration to civilian life, social life or employment transition.

In Romania the role of war veterans was significantly enhanced after 1990. They are regarded as part of the national symbolism contributing to strengthening the historical mindset and military culture. However, deficiencies still remain in terms of providing material support and other benefits, and this is something to be further considered since they represent a category which deserves the gratitude and nationwide recognition for their role and sacrifices during the greatest war of the 20th century.

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