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Paul Robert Magocsi

The Birth of a New Nation, or the Return of an Old Problem? The Rusyns of East Central Europe

As we enter the last decade of the twentieth century, many societies throughout the world, from South Africa to Central America and from the Middle East to Europe, have already or are continuing to experience great changes in their political and socioeconomic structures. Perhaps no greater changes can be found than those that have occurred in the former Soviet Union and East Central Europe. This era of change has also reached the very heart of Europe, that is the Carpathian mountains and foothills inhabited since time immemorial by people who have traditionally called themselves Rusyns but who recently have been known as Ukrainians. One aspect of the on-going changes in the Carpathian region has to do with what has historically been called the nationality question. Today, commentators refer to this phenomenon as the “problem of Rusynism” or Carpatho-Rusynism—*Rusynstvo* or *Karpatorusynstvo*.¹

Who are the Rusyns? Are they a separate people, or are they simply an ethnic group that is part of the Ukrainian people? Do they have—or can they have—a distinct Rusyn language, or is Rusyn simply a series of Ukrainian dialects? These are questions which most writers on the topic had thought were resolved long ago, and certainly by the last decade of the twentieth century. Since the revolutionary year of 1989, however, it has become obvious that not everyone living in the Carpathian region feels that these questions have been answered—or answered convincingly.

In this essay, the term Rusyn refers to the indigenous East Slavs who inhabit primarily the northcentral Carpathian Mountains and who are likely to

¹ The current debate could be said to have begun with a five-part article by the Uzhhorod State University professor of linguistics, Pavlo Chuchka, “Kak rusyny stali ukrainskami,” *Zakarpatskaia pravda* (Uzhhorod), September 12–16, 1989. The debate has since then intensified in Ukraine’s Transcarpathian oblast, former Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia. Beginning in August 1990 and for nearly a year thereafter, the Transcarpathian oblast Ukrainian- and Russian-language daily, *Zakarpats'ka pravda/Zakarpatskaia pravda*, ran a popular column entitled, “Ukraine and Rusynism” (*Ukraina i rusynizm*).

identify themselves in a variety of ways: Rusyn, Rusnak, Lemko, Ukrainian, Slovak, Czechoslovak, or Polish. The East Slavic Rusyns live within the borders of five countries, but because there is inadequate or simply no statistical data available, we can only speak in theoretical terms when discussing numbers.² In theory, there could be as many as 1.2 million Rusyns: 977,000 in the Transcarpathian oblast of Ukraine; 130,000 in the Prešov Region of northeastern Slovakia; 80,000 in the Lemko Region of southeastern Poland as well as other parts of that country; 20,000 in the Maramaroš Region of northern Romania; and 30,000 in former Yugoslavia (Serbia's Vojvodina and Croatia's Slavonia). There is even a small but still undeterminable number of Rusyns in northeastern Hungary.³ Not surprisingly, there are similarities in the Rusyn experience regardless where they reside, but there are also differences precisely because they have lived for most of the twentieth century in different countries. Before turning to a discussion of Rusyns in individual countries, it is necessary to address a few general issues.

Let us begin with a basic theoretical question: are Rusyns a distinct nationality? Or if they are simply an ethnic group, or a branch of another nationality, which one? Ukrainian? Or in the case of the Prešov Region, the Slovak nationality? Or in the Lemko Region, the Polish nationality? Or are they simply a branch—as many writers used to think—of a “common” East Slavic people that had come to be called Russian (*obshcherusskii*)?

Before trying to determine the status of Rusyns, it would be useful first to define what is a nationality. Stated most briefly, a nationality is a group of people who may have certain characteristics, such as a distinct territory (but not necessarily statehood), language, historical memory, religion, and common social and ethnographic characteristics. Ethnic groups and branches of nationalities also may have many of these same common characteristics. What, then, distinguishes a nationality from an ethnic group? The primary distinguishing feature is not the presence or absence of one or more of the above common characteristics, but rather an awareness among members of a given group that they not only have such common characteristics but that it is these

² After World War II, Rusyns were recorded in official statistics only in Yugoslavia (23,000 in 1981) and Romania (1,000 in 1977). Most recently, they have been recorded once again in Czecho-Slovak statistics (see below, note 29).

³ The establishment of two Rusyn cultural organizations in Hungary in 1992 attests to a national revival among a segment of the population in northeastern Hungary that was long thought to have been completely magyarized. See Philip Michaels, “Rusyns in Hungary,” *Carpatho-Rusyn American* 15.3 (Fairview, N.J., 1992): 2; and István Udvari, “Rusyns in Hungary and the Hungarian Kingdom,” in Paul Robert Magocsi, ed., *The Persistence of Regional Cultures: Rusyns and Ukrainians in their Carpathian Homeland and Abroad* (New York, 1993) 105–138.

characteristics which distinguish them from neighboring nationalities. Thus, it is an awareness among a sufficient number of group members—an awareness passed on to future generations through the family and most especially schools—that ultimately defines nationalities.

Therefore, we return to our original question: are Rusyns a distinct nationality? The answer, with perhaps the exception of Rusyns in the Vojvodina, is no. Are Rusyns an ethnic group with numerous common characteristics that both define and distinguish them from their neighbors? In that case, the answer is yes. If, therefore, Rusyns are minimally an ethnic group (divided into many ethnographic sub-groups like Lemkos, Boikos, Dolyniany, Hutsuls), do they have the theoretical potential to develop into a distinct nationality or to become subsumed as part of another nationality? The answer to both parts of that question is yes. It is, in fact, the issue of whether to become a distinct nationality or to be a branch of another nationality that constitutes what has been called the “problem of Rusynism.”

It seemed that this problem was finally resolved during the second half of the twentieth century. Before then the issue was hotly debated, and of the many orientations three finally came to prevail. Some Carpathian East Slavs thought they were part of the Russian nationality, others argued they were Ukrainian, still others believed they comprised a distinct nationality called Carpatho-Rusyn or simply Rusyn.⁴ After World War II, however, with the establishment of Soviet rule first in Subcarpathian Rus' (Transcarpathian Ukraine), and soon after in Poland and Czechoslovakia, the issue was resolved by governmental decree. Regardless of what the East Slavic population of the Carpathians may have thought, they were obliged to accept the official view (formulated in 1924 by the Fifth Comintern and in 1925 by the Communist party Bolshevik of Ukraine) that Rusyns, whatever they may call themselves, are a branch of the Ukrainian nationality.⁵ Moreover, anyone who did not accept this view was dismissed as having a low level of national consciousness, an insufficient education, or worse still, as being an anti-progressive type that might even be an “enemy of the people.”

⁴ The nationality question is discussed in detail in Paul Robert Magocsi, *The Shaping of a National Identity: Subcarpathian Rus', 1848–1948* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978).

⁵ Influenced by a decision taken in December 1925 at the Ninth Congress of the Communist Party (Bolshevik) of Ukraine, the Subcarpathian Communist party adopted one year later at its own Seventh Congress a resolution that read: “It is obvious that we are part of the Ukrainian people . . . and finally we will end . . . all ‘language questions’ [and dispense] with the names ‘Rusyn’, ‘rus'kyi’, or ‘russkii’.” Cited in *Karpats'ka pravda* (Uzhhorod), December 5, 1926.

Indeed, at least since the early 1950s, all of the media as well as the educational system in the Soviet-dominated Carpathian homeland were in the hands of those who accepted the Ukrainian understanding of the problem. Thus, for nearly forty years, the public was continually reminded that the nationality question among Rusyns was resolved. Many, perhaps most, observers, whether in East Central Europe or the West, even believed their own rhetoric. But then came the Gorbachev era and the Revolution of 1989. Suddenly, so it seemed, Rusyns came out of the woodwork. In actual fact, the nationality question had never been resolved. Like numerous other problems in the former Soviet Union and communist-ruled East Central Europe, the Rusyn question was repressed but not suppressed.

But let us return to the question of whether a Rusyn nationality is theoretically possible. We may approach that question by examining the arguments used by those who argue that a Rusyn nationality is not possible. Here, in particular, it is the arguments of those who accept a Ukrainian understanding of the problem that warrant attention. One could also address those who in the past and even still at present might argue that certain Rusyn groups are really a branch of the Slovak (“Rusnaks are Greek Catholic Slovaks”) or Polish (Lemkos are an ethnographic group of Poles) nationalities. To address such viewpoints seems superfluous, however, since today there is general consensus that based on linguistic, cultural, and ethnographic criteria Rusyns are East Slavs and, therefore, cannot be classified with the West Slavic Poles or Slovaks. And as for the view that Rusyns are a branch (*karpatorossy*) of a single East Slavic people called Russian, this is a theoretical construct that has had no practical significance since at least the early nineteenth century when Europe began to be divided according to nationalities. To say, moreover, as some do, that Rusyns are somehow the same people or closely related to Russians borders on the nonsensical. Thus, for those who argue the case for a distinct Rusyn nationality, it is only the Ukrainian alternative that deserves serious attention.

Often defenders of the Ukrainian view argue that “scholarly truth” provides unequivocal proof that Rusyns are a branch of Ukrainians,⁶ and to prove their point citations from modern encyclopedias and other “authoritative” sources are

⁶ For instance, referring to the administratively imposed Ukrainian national identity in the Prešov Region of Slovakia, one author argues that “from the standpoint of historical truth, this change was logical.” Mykola Mušynka, “The Postwar Development of the Regional Culture of the Rusyn-Ukrainians of Czechoslovakia,” in Magocsi, *Persistence of Regional Cultures* 60. This same book includes an essay by Oleksa V. Myšanyč, “From Subcarpathian Rusyns to Transcarpathian Ukrainians,” in which the author argues that the answer to the question of nationality is “provided by the historical record” and “reliance upon historical facts” 49.

duly quoted. But what is “scholarly truth?” I would suggest that those who speak of “scholarly truths” belong to the mindset of pre-secular societies, whose beliefs are based on unquestioning religious dogmas, not on rational thought. In short, in order to understand human societies as well as the natural world, scholars cannot begin with the *a priori* belief that there is an absolute truth waiting to be discovered, but rather that there are constantly changing realities that need to be examined or, at best, that there may be approximations to truths that if found may help us to understand a given social or physical phenomenon.

The dubiousness of “scholarly truths” may be illustrated by one specific example. According to many scholars, a Macedonian nationality for all intents and purposes did not exist before 1944–1945. All the leading Slavists of our century—Lubor Niederle, Jaroslav Bidlo, Miloš Weingart—agreed that Macedonians were a branch of Bulgarians.⁷ That was the “scholarly truth” before 1945. Moreover, it remains the “truth” among Bulgarian and Greek scholars to this very day.⁸ Yet I doubt that supporters of the Ukrainian view on the Rusyn question would deny that Macedonians exist as a nationality. If they recognize that Macedonians are a nationality, then they implicitly accept the possibility that so-called scholarly truths can change. That being the case, it follows that some scholars might defend the proposition that Rusyns are a distinct nationality just as easily as others could argue they are a branch of Ukrainians. The point is that our understanding of social phenomena can and often does change depending on time and circumstances.

Another argument is that Rusyns are not a nationality because they do not have their own language. One does not have to search far to realize that not all nationalities have their own languages. The Irish, the Scots, and the Brazilians

⁷ Cf. Niederle’s “Ethnographic Map of the Slavic World,” in Jaroslav Bidlo et al., *Slovanstvo: obraz jeho minulosti a přítomnosti* (Prague, 1912); and Miloš Weingart, ed., *Slovanské spisovné jazyky v době přítomné* (Prague, 1937). Serbian scholars at the time argued that Macedonians were a branch of the Serbs. Cf. T.R. Georgevitch, *Macedonia* (London and New York, 1918).

⁸ Since World War II, Bulgarian scholarly opinion has varied depending on the country’s political relationship with Yugoslavia. For the current view, applicable since 1956, which considers Macedonians and their language to be “western Bulgarian,” see the study signed by the Institute of the Bulgarian Language at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, “Edinstvo na bŭlgarskija ezik v minaloto i dnes,” *Bŭlgarski ezik* 28 (Sofia, 1978): 3–43. Greek writers adamantly deny that there are any Macedonians within the boundaries of present-day Greece, and they argue that the Slavs in the former Yugoslav Macedonian Federal Republic are really Bulgarians. Most recently, Greece became the only country of the European Community that refused to recognize the newly-independent state of Macedonia unless it were to change its name to the Republic of Skopje or any other name that does not include the designation Macedonian. Cf. Nicholas P. Andriotis, *The Federative Republic of Skopje and Its Language*, 2nd ed. (Athens, 1966).

are only a few of the many cases of thriving nationalities who never had or, for all intents and purposes, have lost their own languages. Nonetheless, a Rusyn nationality supposedly cannot exist because Rusyns do not have their own literary language, which—the argument goes—cannot be created because Rusyns speak a wide variety of dialects. Again, it seems redundant to repeat the obvious: that all peoples speak different dialects. It is precisely the task of the intelligentsia to sort out that problem and to resolve it. All European peoples had their language question, not simply the Rusyns. The choice of one dialect as the basis for a literary standard, or the creation of an interdialectal *koiné*, or the return to some historic literary form—these were some of the options open to intelligentsias who were faced with the reality of dialectal differentiation when trying to create a literary language. This was the *questione della lingua* of Dante as he strove to create an Italian literary language. It was the same question faced by Hus for Czech, by Luther for German, by Štúr for Slovak, by Karadžić for Serbian, by Mistral for Provençal, and by numerous other national leaders who helped to create literary languages for their own purposes.

Rusyn leaders, in particular their nineteenth-century “national awakener” Aleksander Dukhnovych, faced this question as well. While many like to shower often uncritical praise on Dukhnovych, he does not always warrant it. It is certainly true that he created the most famous texts written in Rusyn vernacular, texts which have helped, perhaps more than anything else, to create for Rusyns a common sense of historical memory that is so important in defining national distinctiveness. But as a language theoretician, Dukhnovych’s contributions on behalf of Rusyn were basically negative. As a believer in the “high” and “low” language theory derived from the Czech Slavist Josef Dobrovský, Dukhnovych wrote for the masses in the “low” Rusyn vernacular, but for educated people in a “high” literary language that derived from Church Slavonic mixed with Russian and some local Rusyn vernacular.

Regardless of the dubious value of his “high” language, Dukhnovych’s approach introduced another very unfortunate phenomenon: the belief among Rusyns that their vernacular speech lacked the prestige necessary for serious communication, and that for education and intellectual pursuit some other “higher” more “sophisticated” language had to be used. At various times that “higher” language with the required *dignitas* was either Church Slavonic, Latin, Magyar, Russian, Ukrainian, Slovak, or Polish. It seemed anything would be better than the Rusyn vernacular. Such views from Dukhnovych helped to deter the Rusyn intelligentsia from doing what other intelligentsias did throughout Europe: create a literary language based on one or more of their own local dialects. True, there were some experiments in the twentieth century, and vernacular-based Rusyn readers and grammars were used in the schools of

Subcarpathian Rus' (Voloshyn, Pan'kevych, Haraida) or the Lemko Region (Trokhanovskii), but these were limited to elementary education. A serious sociologically complete literary standard was never created, except among the Rusyns in the Vojvodina (Kostel'nik, Kovach).⁹

Some commentators might add that efforts at creating a Rusyn literary standard were and are still unnecessary because Rusyns are too small a people. This, too, is a spurious argument. There are numerous peoples in Europe smaller in number than the Rusyns, whose intelligentsias have had the desire and courage to create literary languages. Two examples, one from the Slavic and the other from the non-Slavic world, are illustrative: the Lusatian Sorbs of Germany and the Romansch of Switzerland. Like the Rusyns, both the Lusatian Sorbs and Romansch have been and are likely to remain stateless peoples. As for dialectal differentiation, they have resolved this problem by creating more than one literary language. The Sorbs, who number about 80,000 people, have two literary languages: Upper Sorbian and Lower Sorbian. The Romansch, who number only 50,000 people, have as many as five literary languages: Sursilvan, Sutsilvan, Surmiran, Vallader, and Puter—each with its own grammars, dictionaries, newspapers or journals, and texts for use in schools. The Romansch case is of particular interest, since the five Romansch groups are divided geographically, as are Rusyns, by even higher mountains. Yet this did not deter the Romansch intelligentsia from resolving the language question in favor of the local vernacular. In any search for literary languages among Europe's smaller peoples, the Rusyns themselves, at least one branch of them, should not be overlooked. These are the Rusyns in the Vojvodina/Bačka, who today number at most 30,000 and whose intelligentsia successfully created a sociologically complete distinct Rusyn literary language. The point is that dialectal differentiation or small size are not in themselves deterrents to the creation of literary languages.¹⁰ A literary language can be created if the local intelligentsia has the self-confidence and desire to achieve such a goal.

A third argument against the possibility of a Rusyn nationality is that Rusyns do not have their own state, and that to have their own state would require a change of international boundaries which in post-Helsinki Europe is

⁹ For details, see Paul R. Magocsi, "The Language Question Among the Subcarpathian Rusyns," in Riccardo Picchio and Harvey Goldblatt, eds., *Aspects of the Slavic Language Question II* (New Haven, CT, 1984) 49–64.

¹⁰ This principle, albeit with the cooperation of the governmental authorities, has been confirmed in the last decade by the example of the tiny Principality of Monaco, where a new Monégasque literary language has been created and is a required subject in all schools. See Paul Robert Magocsi, "Monégasque Nationalism: A Terminological Contradiction or Practical Reality?" *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 18. 1–2 (Charlottetown, P.E.I., 1991): 83–94.

inappropriate and even dangerous. One might agree that it is not useful to encourage changes in international boundaries, especially since in the future Europe is likely to be based on regions instead of nation-states, with the result that present-day international boundaries will progressively decline in significance.¹¹

But boundaries are not the issue, because nationalities do not necessarily need their own states in order to survive. Many stateless nationalities in Europe are divided between one or more states, such as the Basques and Catalans in Spain and France, the Frisians in the Netherlands and Germany, or the Macedonians in former Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Greece. While it is certainly true that separation by international boundaries makes it more difficult for stateless nationalities to function, some nevertheless can and do exist.

Somewhat related is the issue of the use or misuse of the Rusyn idea by neighboring states for their own political interests. It is true that in the past the Hungarian government promoted the idea of an Uhro-Rusyn nationality not for its own sake but as a step toward further magyarization. It is also true that some Polish officials felt that by promoting a Lemko identity they might weaken the Ukrainian movement and eventually assimilate Lemkos. Finally, it is true that Rusynism was intrinsically advantageous to interwar Czechoslovakia because the central Prague government felt that orientation would help to guarantee the loyalty of its eastern province, Subcarpathian Rus'. And it is also possible that in the last two years of their existence, Soviet state and Communist party organs were interested in promoting Rusynism because they assumed it would provide a convenient counterweight to what for them was the even greater danger of Ukrainian nationalism. But whether or not all the above may have been wholly or even partially true does not negate the value of Rusyn distinctiveness for the Rusyns themselves. All peoples have a right to their own identity, regardless whether the existence of such an identity may at certain times coincide with the interests of outside powers that have their own political agendas.

Turning to individual Rusyn communities, we begin with the largest one in Ukraine's Transcarpathian oblast (Subcarpathian Rus'). The reemergence of

¹¹ Paul Robert Magocsi, "The Revolution of 1989 and the National Minorities of East Central Europe." Several translations of this essay have appeared in Slovak: "Pätnást' minút slávy—a dost'!: národnostné menšiny strednej a východnej Európy dnes a zajtra," *Kultúrny život* 312 (Bratislava, 1991): 8; in Romanian: "Revoluțiile din 1989 și minoritățile naționale în Estul și Centrul Europei," *Tribuna* (Cluj), June 27–July 3, 1991: 9 and 12; and in Hungarian: "1989 és Kelet-Közép-Európa nemzeti kisebbségei," *Regio*, 2.2 (Budapest, 1991): 98–107. A brief English version appeared under the title: "The Era of the Nation-State is Over," *Compass* 9.1 (Toronto, 1991): 13–15.

Rusynism in 1989–1990, whether in the form of an organization like the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns (Obshchestvo Karpats'kykh Rusynov) or in the writings of individual activists came as somewhat of a surprise. It was a surprise because unlike other Rusyn-inhabited lands, Transcarpathia was since the onset of Soviet rule in 1945 basically closed off to the rest of the world. There was little, if any access to Transcarpathia's local press, so that what was known to the outside world came from books put out by state-owned publishing houses that did little more than describe the "road to happiness" (*shliakh do shchastia*) under Soviet rule.¹² Part of the idyllic scenario included descriptions of how the nationality question was supposedly resolved forever. Virtually all western observers accepted Soviet rhetoric, and, therefore, the view that after World War II the only national orientation which proved to be enduring in Transcarpathia was the Ukrainian one. I, too, supported this view, as summed up in 1978 in the conclusion to an extensive study of the nationality question: "Although any one of the three [Russian, Ukrainian, or Rusyn national] orientations might have been implemented, because of the specific culture of the region and the demands of political reality, only the Ukrainian orientation proved to be enduring."¹³ It seemed, therefore, that Rusynism was to go the way of the dinosaur or, at best, be maintained within small and inconsequential immigrant communities like those in the Vojvodina of Yugoslavia and the United States.

But what is Rusynism in Transcarpathia? Is it a movement, or is it just the stirrings of a few individuals? We really do not know the answer to that question. We do know, however, that there has been much discussion about Rusyn distinctiveness and calls for Rusyn-language grammars, dictionaries, literary works, new histories, and encyclopedias. Some have even moved beyond cultural goals to demand changes in the political status of Transcarpathia, specifically the return of autonomy for historic Subcarpathian Rus'. In September 1990, the executive committee of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns in Uzhhorod ratified a "Declaration for the Return to the Transcarpathian Oblast the Status of an Autonomous Republic," which was published in the society's organ, *Otchyi khram*, and sent to Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev, to the Supreme Soviets of the USSR and Ukrainian SSR, and to the United Nations.¹⁴

¹² This idyllic phrase was used as the title of the first substantial historical survey published during Soviet rule, *Shliakhom do shchastia: narysy istorii Zakarpattia* (Uzhhorod, 1973), while a variant, "on the road to the October Revolution," was the title of a multi-volume collection of documents on the region: *Shliakhom Zhovtnia: zbirnyk dokumentiv*, 6 vols. (Uzhhorod, 1957–67).

¹³ Magocsi, *Shaping of a National Identity* 275.

¹⁴ For the text of the "Declaration" and a discussion of its impact on current Transcarpathian political life, see the *Carpatho-Rusyn American* 14.1 (Fairview, NJ, 1991): 4–5.

Not surprisingly, there has been swift reaction from the local pro-Ukrainian intelligentsia. At best, they grudgingly accept the cultural aims of Rusyn spokespersons (what Ukrainians refer to as “ethnographic or cultural Rusynism”), but they are quick to reiterate that such aims must be conceived solely as regional activity among a branch of the Ukrainian people. As for Rusyn political aims, pro-Ukrainian observers dismiss these outright, considering them to be one or more of the following: (1) the machinations of the former KGB; (2) the efforts of pro-Hungarians or pro-Czechs to return Transcarpathia to its former “colonial status” within Hungary or Czechoslovakia; or (3) the result of interference from “wealthy capitalist” elements in the West, in particular among Rusyns in the United States and Canada. Thus, for Ukrainians, the acceptable phenomenon of “cultural Rusynism” (which they view as a regional component of Ukrainianism) is juxtaposed to “political Rusynism,” a negative phenomenon that ostensibly threatens the unity (*sobornost'*) of the Ukrainian state.¹⁵

The Rusyn movement in Transcarpathia is spearheaded by the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns that is based in Uzhhorod and that has seven branches throughout the oblast. Since its establishment in February 1990, the Society has not yet resolved the following dilemma. Its members realize that knowledge of Rusyn history, literature, and culture—that is, pride in being a Rusyn—is lacking in broad segments of Transcarpathia’s East Slavic population. They do not, however, know whether to resolve the dilemma by carrying out popular cultural and educational work, or by trying to change the political system first, after which governmental financial and administrative support would become available to help create in the populace a clear sense of a Rusyn national distinctiveness. A crucial aspect of cultural work, it is argued, would be the creation of a standard Rusyn literary language.¹⁶

Aside from publishing newspapers in Rusyn (*Otchyi khram* and later *Podkarpats'ka Rus'*) and the opening of a Rusyn Center at its branch in

¹⁵ The pro-Ukrainian view is stated most forcefully in Vasyli' Mel'nyk, “Neorusynstvo i ioho interpretatory,” *Zakarpats'ka pravda*, August 18, 21, 22, 24, 1990; Iurii Balega, “Rusynstvo: ideolohy i pokrovyteli,” *ibid.*, September 6, 7, 9, 1990; Oleksa Myshanych, “To khto zhe vony?: do ideinykh vytyokiv novitn'oho ‘karpatorusynstva’,” *Literaturna Ukraina* (Kiev), January 17, 1991; Iurii Balega and Iosyf Sirka, *Khto my ie i chy my dity?: polemika z prof. P.R. Magochi* (Kiev, 1991); Mykola Mushynka, *Politychnyi rusynizm na praktytsi: z pryvodu vystupu prof. Pavla-Roberta Magochi* (Prešov, 1991); and Oleksa Myshanych, *‘Karpatorusynstvo’, ioho dzherela i evoliutsiia u XX st.* (Kiev, 1992).

¹⁶ The cultural aims of the Rusyn movement are best elaborated in the three-part essay by Volodymyr Fedynshynets, “Ia—Rusyn, mii syn—Rusyn. . .,” *Zakarpats'ka pravda*, August 14, 15, 16, 1990; in English translation: Volodymyr Fedynshynets, *Our Peaceful Rusyn Way* (Prešov, 1992) 92–105.

Mukachevo, the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns has been more concerned with political than with cultural activity. Its leaders participated in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe meeting held in Moscow (September 1991), and they have met on numerous occasions with Czechoslovak government officials in Prague as well as with leaders of a few minor Czech political parties who openly called for the return of Subcarpathian Rus' (Transcarpathia) to Czechoslovakia.¹⁷ Nonetheless, whatever sympathies with its western neighbor may have existed, that option was invalidated when Czechoslovakia ceased to exist on January 1, 1993.

The Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, in cooperation with several other organizations representing Transcarpathia's national minorities (Magyars, Germans, Romanians, Gypsies), was also the most adamant force demanding that a special question on Transcarpathian autonomy be placed on the referendum on Ukrainian independence that was held on December 1, 1991. Despite strong protests from local pro-Ukrainian activists, a question was included in the referendum, although "self-rule" instead of autonomy was the choice given voters. In the end, 78 percent opted for self-rule, while at the same time 92 percent supported an independent Ukraine. Such results proved to be inconclusive, however, because it was unclear whether those favoring self-rule were supporting Rusyn national distinctiveness or simply regional self-determination within Ukraine. The referendum results may have been more conclusive had the original proposal of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns been adopted; namely, to provide a question with two options: (1) a distinct autonomous republic: or (2) autonomy within Ukraine. It is interesting to note that the single question on self-rule instead of autonomy reflected a compromise suggested by the then leading and subsequently successful presidential candidate, Leonid Kravchuk, who travelled especially to Transcarpathia the week before the referendum. It was during his visit that Kravchuk stated publicly his own preference that Transcarpathia "should be given special status [in Ukraine] as a

¹⁷ Contacts with Czech political and other public figures have been encouraged and assisted by the Society of Friends of Subcarpathian Rus' (Společnost' Přátel Podkarpatské Rusi), established in Prague in October 1990. The Republican party had as one of its goals—at least until the break-up of the country—the "return of Subcarpathian Rus'" to Czechoslovakia: "Zpět do Československa," *Republika* (Prague), October 18–24, 1990; "Rozhovor s předsedou SPR-RSČ, PhDr. Miroslavem Sládkem," *ibid.*, August 1991. The National Socialist party also took the position that Czechoslovak jurisdiction still applied to Subcarpathian Rus': "NSS chtějí Podkarpatskou Rus," *Lidová demokracie* (Prague), September 3, 1991.

self-governing territory,” as well as his belief that “there is a Rusyn nationality (*natsional'nist'*) and a Rusyn people (*narod*).”¹⁸

For its part, the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns considers the results of the December 1 referendum as an expression of Rusyn national sentiment. The call for self-rule, however, is only the first step toward the eventual creation of an autonomous republic within Ukraine, complete independence, or perhaps reunification with Czechoslovakia. To achieve these goals, the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns and the recently-founded Subcarpathian Republican party (established in early 1992) have called on Czechoslovakia to annul the June 1945 treaty with the former Soviet Union which recognized the cessation of Transcarpathia to the Ukrainian S.S.R., and they have proposed that a plebiscite under international supervision be held in Transcarpathia in order that the population might for “the first time freely decide its fate.”¹⁹ In May 1993, some members of the society went so far as to create a provisional government of a sovereign state of Subcarpathian Rus' with its own ministers and foreign representation in Bratislava, Vienna, and Budapest. When, and if, the Ukrainian government does finally implement some form of self-rule, it remains to be seen whether the populace of Transcarpathia will be satisfied with the status proposed by Kiev or whether they will favor one of the options proposed by the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns and the Subcarpathian Republican party.²⁰

The Ukrainian government in Kiev is also faced with a dilemma. In a genuine effort to address the concerns of its multinational population, all national minorities—whether Russians, Poles, Jews, Germans, and Romanians among others—have been given legal guarantees that protect their languages and cultures. Rusyns, however, do not fall into the category of a national minority. In fact, the Ukrainian press and influential leaders within and outside the government (Dmytro Pavlychko, Ivan Drach, Mykhailo Horyn, Roman Lubkivs'kyi) have without exception criticized Rusynism as little more than an artificial construct whose propagators are considered at best “unenlightened” and at worst “treacherous” to the Ukrainian nation. The local Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukačevo has, in particular, been accused of “separatism” and “acting against the interests of Ukraine,” because it wishes to retain its historic jurisdictional

¹⁸ From the stenographic record of a meeting with regional parliamentary deputies in Transcarpathia, cited in *Podkarpats'ka Rus'* (Uzhhorod), June 19, 1992: 1.

¹⁹ See the declaration of the scholarly seminar organized in May 1992 by the Rusyn Renaissance Society in cooperation with the Ministry of Culture of Slovakia, the Slovak Academy of Sciences, and the *Matica slovenská: Narodný novynký* (Prešov), May 20, 1992; and the “Prohrama Podkarpats'koï Respublikans'koï partii,” *Respublika* (Khust), June 10, 1992: 1–2.

²⁰ “Zakon Ukraïny ‘pro samovriadne Zakarpattia’,” *Karpats'ka Ukraïna* (Uzhhorod), February 20, 1992: 2.

status directly under the Vatican and not be part of the Greek Catholic Church in the rest of western Ukraine.²¹

In theory, there is no reason why Rusyns could not be accepted as a distinct national minority and yet, at the same time, remain loyal citizens of a multinational Ukrainian state. For this to happen, however, long-standing Ukrainian attitudes about the concept of Rusynism would have to change. Based on the seemingly unending polemics from both supporters of the Rusyn and Ukrainian viewpoints, there is little to suggest that such change is in the immediate offing.

In contrast to Transcarpathia, the rebirth of Rusynism in the Prešov Region of Slovakia did not come as a complete surprise. First of all, the Ukrainian orientation never had the strong roots that it did in Subcarpathian Rus' (Transcarpathia) during the interwar years, and it was not imposed on the population of the Prešov Region until as late as 1951-1952. Moreover, during the few months of the Prague Spring in 1968, when censorship was lifted, numerous people in the Prešov Region called for an end to the Ukrainian orientation and for the return of Rusyn schools as well as the establishment of a Rusyn National Council. While it is true that these efforts, like other attempts to establish "socialism with a human face," were brutally crushed by Soviet tanks and that Rusynism was branded as "anti-progressive," "anti-Soviet," and therefore counter-revolutionary, it seems that the Rusyn idea did not die in the Prešov Region. It simply lay dormant until the Revolution of 1989.²²

What was perhaps surprising was the speed with which the Prešov Region's Rusyns and Ukrainians reacted in 1989. Within one week of the November 17 revolution, a new initiative group met in Prešov to demand greater democratization for Rusyns in Slovakia. Two months later, the Cultural Union of Ukrainian Workers (Kul'turnyi Soiuz Ukraïns'kykh Trudiashchykh—KSUT), a civic organization which had been created by Czechoslovakia's Communist government in 1952, was disbanded and replaced by the Union of Rusyn-Ukrainians of Czechoslovakia (Soiuz Rusyniv-Ukraïntsiv Chekhoslovachchyny—SRUCh). But when some Rusyns felt their demands were not being met by SRUCh, in March 1990 they established their own organization in Medzilaborce, the Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusyns'ka Obroda).

Both the pro-Ukrainian SRUCh and the pro-Rusyn Renaissance Society agreed that the greatest tragedy experienced by Rusyns in the Prešov Region was

²¹ *Karpats'ka Ukraïna* (Uzhhorod), July 9, 1992.

²² On the impact of 1968 and subsequent developments before 1989, see Pavel Maču, "National Assimilation: The Case of the Rusyn-Ukrainians of Czechoslovakia," *East Central Europe* 2.2 (Pittsburgh, 1975): 101-132.

their slovakization. Both orientations also agreed that all efforts must be undertaken to reverse slovakization and to restore an awareness among the local population that they belong to an East Slavic Rus' culture. The two orientations disagreed, however, about the causes and ways to resist further national assimilation. The pro-Ukrainian SRUCh considers assimilation the result of: (1) pressure from the former Communist government in Slovakia, including veiled threats of deportation to Ukraine; (2) the unwise manner in which ukrainianization was forcibly—they say “administratively”—introduced in the early 1950s; and (3) the lack of commitment on the part of the local population toward their national identity and/or the incompetence of Ukrainian-language teachers.²³ In part, the pro-Rusyn Renaissance Society agrees with this explanation, but then asks why the Ukrainian orientation was such a failure after thirty years of strong support from a Czechoslovak Communist government that provided generous budgets for a Ukrainian-language theater, a university department and research institute, elementary and secondary schools, radio program, museum, newspapers, journals, publishing house, and other cultural organizations?

Czechoslovak authorities and non-governmental observers also asked about the results from such an investment that funded so many institutions and cultural activists. On the one hand, there have been some remarkably positive achievements, especially with regard to publications like the first-rate scholarly journal (*Naukovyi zbirnyk*) of the Museum of Ukrainian Culture. Moreover, cultural institutions like the Dukla Ukrainian Song and Dance Ensemble have brought renown to the group and to Czechoslovakia as a result of its several tours throughout Europe and North America.

But when it comes to the Rusyn population in general—as the Rusyn Renaissance Society suggests—all the arguments and justifications to the contrary cannot erase the reality of a Ukrainian orientation which after three decades has brought catastrophic results. For instance, during the interwar first Czechoslovak republic, there were over 91,000 inhabitants in the Prešov Region who declared themselves to be of Rusyn nationality (1930). Even under the supposedly oppressive and assimilationist Hungarian regime before World War I, more than 111,000 inhabitants in the Prešov Region declared their language to be Rusyn (1910). After 1952, however, when a Ukrainian orientation was introduced, the numbers steadily declined, so that by the census of 1980 there were less than 40,000 inhabitants who were willing to identify as Ukrainian.

²³ Anna Kuz'miak, “Polipshyt'sia stan natsional'noho shkil'nytstva?” *Nove zhyttia* (Prešov), October 19, 1990: 7–8.

This figure represented less than one-third the estimated 130,000 persons of Rusyn background who actually inhabit the Prešov Region.²⁴

The prognosis for the future is even worse, because the all-important educational system, which is a primary means of preserving national cultures, is virtually non-existent. In 1947/1948, the last school year before a Ukrainian orientation began to be introduced, there were 272 elementary schools in Rusyn villages and 5 *gymnasia* in nearby towns with a total of 22,000 students. Since that time the number of Ukrainian schools steadily declined, so that by 1990/1991 there remained only 15 elementary schools where some subjects were taught in Ukrainian to a total student body of only 908!²⁵

These developments, which have been categorized by pro-Ukrainian leaders themselves as “catastrophic” from the standpoint of preserving an East Slavic Rusyn identity, are not the result of forced slovakization on the part of former governmental authorities (although it is likely that many Slovaks, especially in Eastern Slovakia, were not upset by the results). Nor are they result of the administrative introduction of ukrainianization, or the lack of national awareness on the part of the population. They are the result of actions by the Rusyns themselves, who under a Stalinist regime spoke out in the only way they could. They did not want to be called Ukrainians and did not want to have Ukrainian-language schools. If, they concluded, they were not permitted to have their own Rusyn identity and schools as they had had before, then they would prefer to have a Slovak identity and Slovak schools instead. Such action was not the mark of a lack of national consciousness. Rather, it reflected a clear awareness of what one was—and also what one did not want to be. While it may seem paradoxical, the solution proposed since 1990 by supporters of the pro-Ukrainian SRUCh organization has been to demand that more Ukrainian be taught in schools and to argue that the Rusyns of Slovakia should find their salvation by identifying with a newly-independent Ukrainian state in the east.²⁶

The new realities set in motion in 1989 and the implementation of democratic changes in Czechoslovakia forced the Prešov Region’s pro-Ukrainian leadership to alter its views on the nationality question. They began to argue that the name *Rusyn* is acceptable and that the literary Ukrainian language used in

²⁴ A discussion of Rusyn nationality estimates is found in Paul R. Magocsi, *The Rusyn-Ukrainians of Czechoslovakia: A Historical Survey* (Vienna, 1983) 64, n. 91.

²⁵ Ivan Vanat, Mykhailo Rychalka, and Andrii Chuma, *Do pytan' pisliavoiennoho rozvytku, suchasnoho stanu ta perspektyv ukrains'koho shkilnytstva v Slovacchyni* (Prešov, 1992) 13.

²⁶ See the 15-point declaration of the pro-Ukrainian intelligentsia in Czechoslovakia: “Stavlennia rus'ko-ukrains'koi inteligentsii Chekho-Slovacchyny do suchasnykh protsesiv nashoho kul'turno-natsional'noho zhyttia,” *Nove zhyttia* (Prešov), December 21, 1990: 3.

their publications should employ more words from the local dialects. This proved to be at best a semantic compromise. Hence, while the name *Rusyn* might be used, it should only appear in the hyphenated form, *Rusyn-Ukrainian*. In short, the name *Rusyn* must be understood as a synonym for *Ukrainian*.

While still in the wake of euphoria from the November 1989 revolution, one of the Prešov Region's most active Ukrainian spokespersons and a primary defender of the hyphenated name *Rusyn-Ukrainian* revealed quite openly the real intentions of the Ukrainian orientation by using a classic Leninist image to make his point:

Sometimes it happens that in order to make two steps forward, it is necessary to take one step backwards. And we have taken this one step backwards. . . . In the given circumstances we have moved from a purely Ukrainian position to a Rusyn-Ukrainian position. We had to do this, because if we would distance ourselves from popular (not political) Rusynism, we would simply lose what little we have. I would say that if there will be a group of Rusyns who want to be Rusyns and not Slovaks, then in ten years they, too, will sing [the Ukrainian national anthem] 'Ukraine Has Not Yet Perished': that is, they will have become convinced Ukrainians.²⁷

Such statements remind Rusyn supporters of the attitude of Bulgarian chauvinists who occupied Macedonia during World War II: "You Macedonians are our Bulgarian brothers, even though you might not be fully aware of the fact, but you are backward and ignorant and must obey us, your elder and wiser brothers, without hesitation or question, until you learn to behave correctly, as proper Bulgarians."²⁸

In many ways, the Rusyn movement in Slovakia has been more successful than in neighboring Ukraine and Poland. First, it succeeded in getting a section of SRUCh's Ukrainian-language weekly newspaper, *Nove zhyttia*, to appear in Rusyn under the rubric, "Voice of the Rusyns" (*Holos rusyniv*). Then, in early 1991, when differences of opinion regarding the national orientation of *Nove zhyttia* could no longer be rectified, the editor-in-chief Aleksander Zozuliak and most of his staff resigned. Within a few months they joined forces with the Rusyn Renaissance Society and started a new newspaper (*Narodny novynky*) and illustrated magazine (*Rusyn*) published entirely in Rusyn. At the same time, the Ukrainian National Theater (established in 1945) changed its name to the Aleksander Dukhnovych Theater and the language of its productions became

²⁷ Interview with Mykola Mušynka, head of the Ukrainian Research Institute at Šafárik University in Prešov, following the founding Congress of the Union of Rusyn-Ukrainians in Czechoslovakia—SRUCh, cited in *Družno vpered* 4 (Prešov, 1990): 2.

²⁸ Cited in Horace G. Lunt, "Some Linguistic Aspects of Macedonian and Bulgarian," in Benjamin A. Stolz et al., *Language and Literary Theory: In Honor of Ladislav Matejka* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1984) 112.

Rusyn instead of Ukrainian. Even the newly-established Museum of Modern Art in Medzilaborce, supported by the Andy Warhol Foundation in New York City, opened its doors in the summer of 1991 with emphasis on the Rusyn roots of the famous American pop artist and media figure whose prints and paintings now adorn the walls of what might otherwise have been a largely unnoticed provincial museum. The Rusyn Renaissance Society also lobbied successfully to have the name Rusyn added and recorded as a category distinct from Ukrainian in the 1991 decennial census. This latter achievement effectively meant that Rusyns were *de facto* if not *de jure* recognized as a distinct national minority in Czechoslovakia.²⁹

Perhaps the greatest symbolic achievement of the Rusyn movement in Slovakia was the decision of the Rusyn Renaissance Society to hold the First World Congress of Rusyns. It took place in March 1991 in the town of Medzilaborce in the new and grandiose cultural center which subsequently became the home of the Warhol Family Museum of Modern Art. Despite a history of interaction between Rusyns in the homeland and the immigrant community in the United States during the twentieth century, this was, in fact, the first time representatives from all countries where Rusyns live (Ukraine, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, the United States) gathered together in one place. The congress constituted itself as a permanent umbrella organization, and its very existence had an enormous impact on instilling Rusyn national pride in the over 300 persons who attended, not to mention innumerable others who read about it through the generally widespread press coverage.³⁰

At present, the Rusyn and Ukrainian movements in the Prešov Region continue their rivalry to obtain the support of their East Slavic constituency and, in particular, funding from the Slovak government. Current government policy is to provide equal support to both Rusyn and Ukrainian orientations, and it remains to be seen which of the two will be more successful in its efforts to convince the people that they are either a distinct East Slavic nationality known as Rusyns or a branch of the Ukrainian nationality known as Rusyn-Ukrainians.

Just north of the Prešov Region and beyond the crests of the Carpathian Mountains is the Lemko Region of Poland where even before the Revolution of

²⁹ The total number of East Slavs recorded in 1991 in the Prešov Region was 32,408, divided into 16,937 Rusyns; 13,847 Ukrainians; and 1,624 Russians. *Preliminary Results of the Population and Housing Census: Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, March 3, 1991* (Prague, 1991) 30–31.

³⁰ Information on the First World Congress as well as its official declaration are found in the *Carpatho-Rusyn American* 14.2 and 14.3 (Fairview, NJ, 1991): 7–9 and 8–9.

1989 a revival on behalf of Rusyn national specificity had begun. The Lemkos were unique among Rusyns in that they were deported (voluntarily and then forcibly) from their Carpathian villages between 1945 and 1947. Two-thirds of the approximately 180,000 went eastward to the Soviet Ukraine, the rest were resettled in the southwest (Silesia) and northwest (Pomerania) of Poland on territory that had formerly been part of Germany. Even when living in the Carpathians, the Lemkos were cut off from their Rusyn brethren in Slovakia and Transcarpathia by geographic and, in the twentieth century, by political borders. Nonetheless, ever since the first national revival in the late nineteenth century, Lemko writers and political activists always emphasized their cultural affinity with all the East Slavs of Rus', and in particular with the Rusyns living along the southern slopes of the Carpathians in the Prešov Region of Slovakia and Transcarpathia.³¹ It is not surprising, therefore, that Lemkos welcomed the revival of a Rusyn national orientation that took place in Slovakia and Ukraine's Transcarpathia after 1989.

The Lemkos had embarked on their own path of national rediscovery already in the mid-1980s, when a group of younger writers, who had already published a few collections of poetry in Lemko-Rusyn vernacular, established an annual cultural festival called the Vatra. As in the Prešov Region and in Transcarpathia, these young activists were criticized from the beginning by Ukrainian-oriented Lemkos and by Ukrainians in Poland. They prevailed, however, and in early 1989, established a cultural organization, the Lemko Association (Stovaryshhnia Lemkiv) as well as a Rusyn-language magazine (*Besida*).³² The situation in Poland is somewhat similar to Slovakia in that the Rusyn orientation is headed primarily by younger people born and raised after World War II, while the Ukrainian orientation is represented by older activists born before the war and who, in 1990, founded their own Union of Lemkos (Ob'iednannia Lemkiv).

Just as the threat of national assimilation affects Rusyns in Slovakia, so, too—but in the form of polonization—does it have serious implications for Lemkos in Poland. Similarly, Ukrainians as well as Ukrainian-oriented Lemkos in Poland and Ukraine use the same arguments: support of Lemko-Rusyn distinctiveness (they call it “separatism”) will ostensibly lead to further polonization.³³ Also as in Slovakia, the Ukrainian orientation in Poland has had

³¹ The sense of affinity was further emphasized by the name *Rusnak*, which Lemkos invariably called themselves until the introduction of the new name *Lemko* in the first decades of the twentieth century.

³² For details on the recent Lemko-Rusyn national revival, see the series of articles in the *Carpatho-Rusyn American* 10.1, 2, 3, 4 and 11.1 (Fairview, NJ, 1987–88).

³³ The most prolific Lemko spokesperson for the Ukrainian viewpoint is Ivan Krasovskyyi, who emigrated to Ukraine in 1945. See his recent volume, co-authored with Dmytro Solynko, *Khto my, Lemky . . .* (L'viv, 1991).

more than thirty years to transform Lemkos into Ukrainians. Yet neither has ukrainianization occurred nor has the trend toward polonization been halted.

Finally, and again like Rusyns in the Prešov Region, the Lemkos have been at work trying to standardize a literary language. This, of course, raises a very practical side of the language question. Should each group of Rusyns create its own literary language, or should an effort be made to create a single standard for all Rusyns regardless of where they live?

Because languages have such powerful symbolic value as the embodiment of national cultures as well as the instrument by which those cultures are preserved for future generations, it is not surprising that the question of a literary standard has been raised in the publications and proclamations of virtually every new Rusyn organization founded since 1990. The only exception is the small group of Rusyns in former Yugoslavia, who already have a sociologically complete literary language that dates back to the 1920s and that since World War II has been recognized as an official medium in schools and public life.³⁴

In order to resolve the thorny issue of how to create a literary standard from among several dialects spoken by Rusyns in five countries, the Rusyn Renaissance Society in Slovakia, in cooperation with the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center in the United States, convened a working seminar, or language congress, in November 1992. Journalists, writers, amateur grammarians, and scholars from all countries where Rusyns live agreed at the language congress on the principles and mode of action in language building.³⁵ The participants accepted the territorial principle adopted by the Romansch of Switzerland; namely, that Rusyns in each region would: (1) create their own standard based on the region's main dialect; (2) use each of the new standards in publications and in schools; and (3) meet regularly to work on a single Carpatho-Rusyn standard, or *koiné*, for all regions. Since the Yugoslav Rusyns already have a literary standard, three others are to be created for Transcarpathia (Ukraine), the Prešov Region (Slovakia), and the Lemko Region (Poland).³⁶ In fact, language

³⁴ The standard Vojvodinian or Bačka Rusyn grammars are by Havrijil Kostel'nik (1923) and Mikola Kočiš (1971 and 1977). This fourth East Slavic language, as Vojvodinian Rusyn is known, has in recent years been the subject of intense scrutiny among Slavists worldwide, including Sven Gustavsson (Uppsala, Sweden), Aleksander Duličenko (Tartu, Estonia), Henrik Birnbaum (Los Angeles, California), Horace G. Lunt (Cambridge, Massachusetts), and Jiří Marvan (Melbourne, Australia).

³⁵ The Rusyn language congress, which received wide coverage in the Slovak media, also included speakers representing the Romansch in Switzerland and the Monégasque of Monaco. For details, see the entire issue of *Rusyn* 2.5–6 (Prešov, 1992) and Paul Robert Magocsi, "Scholarly Seminar on the Codification of the Rusyn Language," *Österreichischen Ostheften* 35.1 (Vienna, 1993): 186–188.

³⁶ Rusyns from Hungary also participated in the congress, but agreed to use in their publications the same standard adopted for Slovakia's Prešov Region.

practitioners in each region have already prepared preliminary versions of grammars³⁷ and have used the local vernacular in newspapers. To coordinate the work of the codifiers, a Rusyn Language and Culture Research Institute (Nauchno-doslidnyi Instytut Rusyns'koho Iazyka i Kul'tury) was created in Prešov, Slovakia in January 1993.

In terms of a literary language as well as an organizational infrastructure for a Rusyn national life, the Vojvodinian or Bačka-Srem Rusyns of Yugoslavia are—or were until quite recently—in the best situation. This is because the former Yugoslav government recognized them as a distinct nationality after World War II. Together with such favourable external support, their own intelligentsia created a whole host of schools, cultural organizations, publications, and media programs—all in the Vojvodinian variant of Rusyn. The language has been particularly well developed, and besides the works of local novelists and poets, there are Vojvodinian Rusyn texts that range from the Bible, Shakespeare, and Pushkin to Marx and Engels. All of this was created for what today number less than 30,000 people. Clearly the Vojvodinian Rusyns are an outstanding, if not unique, example of what can be done if the ruling authorities are favorably inclined and if the local intelligentsia is willing to work effectively.³⁸

Although it might seem that the nationality question has been resolved in favor of a Rusyn orientation, a closer look suggests that some spokespersons in Yugoslavia are uncomfortable with the idea that Rusyns form a nationality entirely unto themselves. These people basically consider Yugoslavia's Rusyns to be part of the Ukrainian nationality, even though they are reluctant to call their people other than Rusyn (in local parlance, Rusnak/Rusnatsi) or to use a literary language other than their own standard, for fear that they would lose the support of the ordinary masses who seem quite content with being Rusyn and nothing else.

Considering the fact that Rusyns have been able to maintain their own language and identity in Yugoslavia, it may seem difficult to understand why the Ukrainian orientation has gained some adherents. In part, the attraction of the Ukrainian orientation is a reaction to the fear of national assimilation that is

³⁷ These include for the Lemko Region: Myroslava Chomjak, *Grammatyka lemkiivskoho jazyka* and *Lemkivska grammatyka dlia dity*; for the Prešov Region: Jurij Pan'ko, *Normy rusyns'koho pravopysu*; and for Transcarpathia: Ihor Kerča and Vasyl' Sočka-Boržavyn, *Rusyn'skyi iazyk: ocherk kompleksnoi praktychnoi gramatyky*.

³⁸ There is an extensive literature on the Vojvodinian Rusyns. Cf. Vida Zaremski et al., *Bibliografija Rusnatsokh u Iugoslavii* (Novi Sad, 1989).

inevitable for a people so small in number, regardless of the support they might receive from the state. Thus, local Ukrainophiles argue that Vojvodinian Rusyns would not assimilate to Serbian or Croatian culture if they could be taught to identify as Ukrainians and associate with a culture that is larger and, therefore, ostensibly more attractive than their own.

The existence of a Ukrainian orientation among the Vojvodinian Rusyns is also, in part, a result of the peculiar legal norms adopted by the former federal Yugoslav state. Despite their small number, the Rusyns were designated in 1974 one of the five official nationalities in Serbia's autonomous province of Vojvodina. Yugoslav law required, however, that a nationality could be considered as such only if it had a recognized "motherland" somewhere else beyond the borders of Yugoslavia. Since at the time there was no Rusyn state or officially recognized Rusyn nationality elsewhere, the motherland (*matichna zem*) of the Vojvodinian Rusyns became, by default, Ukraine—even though in actual fact most of the ancestors of the group did not come from Ukraine (Transcarpathia) but rather from what is today southeastern Slovakia.

In the wake of the Revolution of 1989 and the Rusyn national revival in the Carpathian homeland, the Vojvodinian Rusyns began to feel they could legitimately justify their own existence without reference to Ukraine but rather to a Rusyn nationality that was gradually coming to be recognized in Slovakia, Poland, and perhaps eventually in Ukraine as well. It was in large part these new post-1989 realities in the Carpathian homeland that encouraged the Vojvodinian Rusyns to revive an older organization, the Rusyn Matka Society (Ruska Matka), which came into existence the same year (1990) as the pro-Ukrainian Union of Rusyn-Ukrainians in Yugoslavia (Soiuz Rusinokh i Ukraintsokh Iugoslavii).³⁹ The increasing differentiation between the Rusyn and Ukrainian orientations among Vojvodina's Rusyns also became evident in the Department of Rusyn Language and Literature (established in 1975) at the University of Novi Sad, which includes scholars of both persuasions. On the other hand, the two existing Rusyn secondary schools (*gymnasium* and pedagogical institute) offer instruction exclusively in the Vojvodinian variant of Rusyn, and they remain a stronghold for producing new cadres of young people who are conscious of their distinct national identity.

The internal debates among this smallest group of Rusyns have been overshadowed, however, by the more recent unfortunate turn of events in Yugoslavia. Effectively, the Rusyns in former Yugoslavia are since 1991 divided

³⁹ It was the head of the Rusyn Matka Society who first began to question the need for a "Ukrainian motherland." See the conceptual/ideological statement of the Rusyn Matka Society by Liubomir Medieshi, "Programski osnov za dištvovanie Ruskei Matki," *Ruske slovo* (Novi Sad), December 21–28, 1990, *dotatok*.

by the boundaries of two states: Serbia (which includes the Vojvodina) and Croatia (the far eastern part of which includes the second Rusyn cultural center of Vukovar, virtually levelled in 1991 during Yugoslavia's civil war). Whether the new governments of Serbia and Croatia will be as supportive of national minorities as was the old federal state of Yugoslavia remains an open question, the answer to which will clearly have a profound impact on this smallest of Rusyn minorities.

Having reviewed briefly the Rusyn movement in four countries, are there any common features that can be discerned? There are, indeed, several. We have seen that since 1989 each region has both pro-Rusyn and pro-Ukrainian orientations. But who are the individuals who have set the ideological tone for those orientations? Regardless of orientation, they comprise mostly university and *gymnasium* teachers, journalists, writers, and activists in cultural organizations, in particular the theater.

There is a difference, however, in the age and therefore attitude among the activists of each orientation. Most of the pro-Ukrainian activists are in the 55 to 65 year-old range, born before World War II.⁴⁰ As young adults, they experienced the worst years of Stalinist repression as well as the forced change to a Ukrainian national identity. The authoritarian nature of the environment in which they were formed also inculcated in them the belief that decisions about social policy are best made by an educated elite who has access to "truths," historic or otherwise, that should subsequently be taught to and accepted by the populace as a whole.

In contrast, the leading pro-Rusyn activists are mostly between 35 and 50 years old, that is they were born during or after World War II and acculturated for the most part during the 1970s and 1980s.⁴¹ That was a time when Communist rule had lost its authoritarian edge and when at least the inhabitants of Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia were exposed to more liberal influences from western Europe. It is also useful to note that almost all Rusyn activists were

⁴⁰ Biographical data on pro-Ukrainian activists in Transcarpathia and the Prešov Region are found in *Pys'mennyky Zakarpattia: bibliohrafichnyi dovidnyk* (Uzhhorod, 1989) and "Avtory zhurnalu 'Duklia'," *Duklia* 26.1 (Prešov, 1978): 57–79.

⁴¹ Of 10 members in the executive of the Lemko Association in Poland, 9 were born after 1942; of 8 members of the executive of the Rusyn Renaissance Society in Slovakia, 5 were born after 1942; of 10 executive members in the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns in Uzhhorod, 5 were born after 1942. The founding chairmen of the five new Rusyn organizations established in 1991–1992 were all in their thirties. See the biographies in "I Kongres Stovaryshynia Lemkiv," *Besida* 2.3–4 (Krynica, 1990): 8–9 and "The Society of Carpatho-Rusyns," *Carpatho-Rusyn American* 15.1 (Fairview, NJ., 1992): 4–5.

educated in Ukrainian schools and had accepted, passively if not actively, a Ukrainian national identity. Therefore, they had to “rediscover” their Rusyn roots. The point is that they became conscious Rusyns only after having known fully what it meant to be Ukrainian.

Partly reflective of the age differentiation is the fact that pro-Ukrainian civic and academic institutions, in particular in Transcarpathia and the Prešov Region, are still headed by individuals who held the same or similar positions during the pre-1989 Communist era. As for the pro-Rusyns, they were either too young to be part of the pre-1989 system or they held positions that were of no particular influence. Thus, in some ways, the Rusyn-Ukrainian dichotomy can be seen as a generational struggle between “fathers and sons” in which the older Ukrainian generation—and therefore orientation—is accused by its rivals, sometimes with justification, of being tainted by its “Communist” past.⁴²

Another characteristic related in part to age is the intellectual basis of each orientation. The Ukrainian orientation has an established body of literature explaining how Rusyns gradually developed into Ukrainians in the course of the twentieth century. Those views, moreover, generally predominate in departments that specialize in the local language and ethnography at Prešov’s Šafárik University in Slovakia and at the University of Uzhhorod in Ukraine.⁴³ In contrast, the Rusyn orientation was initially comprised of youthful enthusiasts whose demands for publications about Rusyns or for the creation of a Rusyn literary language were often little more than idealistic desires well beyond the intellectual resources of the group. That situation has gradually begun to change with the recent creation of an Institute for Carpathian Studies (Instytut Karpartyky) at the University of Uzhhorod, a Rusyn Language and Culture Research Institute in Prešov, and a Department of Ukrainian and Rusyn Philology in Nyíregyháza (Hungary), all of which are staffed by academics

⁴² It is ironic that the founding chairman of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns in Uzhhorod, Mykhailo M. Tomchani (b. 1946), and the founding chairman of the Initiative Group for the Remoulding of Czechoslovakia’s Rusyn-Ukrainians, Aleksander Zozuliak (b. 1953), are the sons of the leading post-World War II Ukrainian-language writers respectively in Transcarpathia and the Prešov Region: Mykhailo I. Tomchani and Vasyl’ Zozuliak.

⁴³ Among the pro-Ukrainian scholars at these institutions, all of whom have spoken out adamantly against the Rusyn orientation in newspaper articles and brochures are Iurii Bacha, Fedir Kovach, Iurii Mulychak, Mykola Mushynka, Mykola Shtets’, and Ivan Vanat in Prešov, and Iurii Balega, Pavlo Chuchka, Vasyl’ Hanchyn, and Mykhailo Tivodar in Uzhhorod, joined by Academician Oleksa Myshanych from Kiev.

sympathetic to the Rusyn orientation.⁴⁴ Scholarship and cultural activities were also the primary themes at the Second World Congress of Rusyns that took place in May 1993 in Krynica, Poland, and where specific proposals were adopted for closer coordination between Rusyn scholarly institutions and publications in all countries where they live.⁴⁵

In conclusion, we may return to the question posed at the outset of this essay: are Rusyns a separate people or simply a branch of Ukrainians? At present, we still do not have an answer. All we do know is that there is a nation-building process taking place. Many of the classic building blocks needed to create a nationality—language, historical ideology, publications, cultural and scholarly organizations, theaters, schools—are indeed being developed. But whether those building blocks will be fully constructed, and whether the countries in which Rusyns live will remain sympathetic to such efforts,⁴⁶ and, most importantly, whether the masses themselves will embrace the idea of a distinct Rusyn nationality remain open questions.

⁴⁴ The Uzhhorod institute is headed by Dr. Ivan Pop, also editor of the prestigious Moscow journal, *Slavianovedenie*; the Prešov institute by Dr. Iurii Pan'ko; and the Nyíregyháza department by Dr. István Udvari.

⁴⁵ "Postanova z II. Svitovoho kongresu rusyniv u Krynytsi," *Narodný novynký* (Prešov), June 2, 1993: 3.

⁴⁶ On the legal status of Rusyns in each of the countries where they live, see Paul Robert Magocsi, "Carpatho-Rusyns: Their Current Status," in Jana Plichtová, ed., *Minorities in Politics: Cultural and Languages Rights—Bratislava Symposium II* (Bratislava, 1992) 212–227, also in Slovak translation with commentaries by L'udovít Haraksim, Mykola Mušynka, and Andrzej Zięba in *Slovenský národopis* 40.2 and 40.3 (Bratislava, 1992): 183–204 and 317–322.