AN AMERICAN IN KRYNICA

GUEST EDITORIAL

I could hardly believe it. There I was in Krynica, Poland, at the Second World Congress of Rusyns. The congress was held in the indescribably beautiful Lemko Region of southeastern Poland, once home to tens of thousands of Lemko Rusyns prior to their forced deportation to Ukraine or areas near Poland’s border with Germany. Today there is again a small but growing Rusyn presence in the Lemko Region as the children and grandchildren of those displaced have returned to their native region. One need only view the splendor of the Carpathian Mountains to understand why.

I felt how historic this moment was, and I was not alone. Polish, Slovak, and Yugoslav radio and television covered the proceedings. Every Rusyn newspaper in Eastern Europe was there, as well as reporters from other countries who interviewed Rusyns about the steps they are taking to revive their culture and to meet the challenges they face.

There was a real sense of anticipation in the air—and a real sense of camaraderie. This all began already before the conference. Earlier in the week, I and another American delegate, Peter Baycura, were visiting Rusyn villages in northeastern Slovakia and stopped at the Warhol Family Museum of Modern Art in Medzilaborce. There we talked with Mychal Turok, whose brother Vasyl’ is president of the Rusyns’ka Obroda (Rusyn Renaissance Society) in Slovakia. Mychal told us that the society was sponsoring a bus from Prešov to Krynica for the congress, and that Rusyns from Transcarpathia (Ukraine), Slovakia, Yugoslavia, and Hungary would all be there for the ride. He explained that we were welcome to go with them, an invitation we readily accepted.

We arrived that Friday afternoon at the Duchnový Theatre in Prešov, where we met Dean Poloka, another member of the American delegation, and the many Rusyns who would be travelling with us. We boarded the bus and left for Krynica, winding our way up through the Carpathian Mountains of northern Slovakia.

As we travelled, the mountains got higher, the villages tinier and more scenic, and there was the singing—yes, the singing. Although we Rusyns came from several different countries, we had as a binding tie our culture, manifested here in our folk music. “Červena ruža,” “Ej, oj tili tili,” “A ja taka čarna,” and many others were songs shared by all of us who had gathered for the same purpose, the perpetuation of a living Rusyn culture that centuries ago gave birth to these songs. How can I describe it? Even before the congress had begun, its key message had already been delivered and reaffirmed. The Rusyns ARE! Here we were, people from five different countries, living our culture, singing our songs, preparing to discuss our achievements, in short—as we drove through the ever steepening Carpathian homeland—being RUSYNS!

I reflected on the statement heard so often in my college years and since then about the various cultures in the world. Governments, political systems, histories, to some degree even languages (the vast majority of Irish in the world today speak English, not Gaelic) do not determine an independent people or their culture—people do! It is how a people lives, its value systems, its artistic expression, its sense of oneness and uniqueness that determine who is a people or nationality. And here was proof of it. Despite the fact that scholars may have debated whether Rusyns are a people, in the Rusyn community the answer is quite clear. All of us on the bus knew we are a unique people with a unique culture. That simply cannot be taken away from us.

At the congress itself, many spoke passionately about their beloved Rusyn culture and how important it was to be identified with it. I listened as the Yugoslav Rusyns told of their incredible achievements in writing, language, publication, and education, and while mourning the division and, in some instances, the dispersal of their community caught in a Yugoslav war in which they play no role. The Rusyns of Serbia described the limitations of continuing their cultural work during wartime and the difficulty in keeping in touch with their fellow Rusyns in the Srem region of Croatia, thousands of whom have also lost their lives or have been uprooted from villages they have called home for over two centuries.

I listened as the first ever delegate from Romania stood to address us about the renaisance of Rusyn culture in her country, beginning by apologizing that she must speak in Ukrainian because in the school system of communist Romania, it was the only language besides Romanian in which she, as a Rusyn, was permitted to study.

I listened as a radio reporter from Berlin—the granddaughter of a Lemko Rusyn relocated to Germany—described her sense of longing for her people: “I would tell friends in Germany about my people, the Lemkos, and they would say, ‘there is no such people—we have never heard of them’. Then I come here,” she said, her eyes brightening, “and I see that I am not alone.”

I listened as the Rusyns of Ukraine described their frustration with a government at best lukewarm about their efforts and a failed economy pushing them to the brink of disaster. And yet, their spirit remains undaunted. They spoke eloquently about their efforts to assure that Transcarpathia become once again the center of Rusyn cultural and religious life that it was at an earlier time.

I listened as the Rusyns of Hungary declared with joy the news that they and their society, the Organization of Rusyns in Hungary, has been officially recognized and that it is already publishing scholarly works and poetry in Rusyn. I heard them talk as well about a new Department of Ukrainian and Rusyn Philology at a Teacher’s College in Nyíregyháza.

I heard the Rusyns of Slovakia talk about their Rusyn-language publications, their professional Rusyn-language theater, and the progress that all the Rusyn groups have made in eastern Europe working together for the codification and standardization of the Rusyn language, including the establishment in Prešov of an Institute for the Study of Rusyn Language.

Finally, I heard the Lemkos of Poland, our hosts, relate how after some delay governmental authorities at various levels provided financial as well as moral support for the Second World Congress. The Lemkos were particularly concerned that their right to return home and to reclaim lands lost in 1947 be recognized by the Polish government.

The information was overwhelming. These Rusyn brothers and sisters of ours, most of whom are young and college educated, have achieved so much in so short a time. Why have they fought so hard for their culture and identity? Why were they there in Krynica, devoting their time and resources? Why was I there? Perhaps it is the inescapable fact that we cannot deny who we are. Perhaps being Rusyn defines us for ourselves. Perhaps Aleksander Duchnový was more than a priest and a poet. Was he not also a prophet when he wrote: “I was, am, and will be a Rusyn . . . .”

John J. Righetti
Mars, Pennsylvania
The church has traditionally played a decisive role in the life of Carpatho-Rusyns. Moreover, at least until the twentieth century, it was usually within the church that young Rusyns could hope to pursue a career other than one on the land. Some Rusyn families even came to be considered “dynasties,” because they included many priests who were related as fathers, uncles, sons, or grandsons. One such “dynasty” of Greek Catholic priests was from the Sembratovyc family in the Lemko Region of what was before World War I the province of Galicia in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In the course of the nineteenth century, two young Sembratovyc’s became priests and were to attain the office of metropolitan of L'viv, the highest ecclesiastical office in the Greek Catholic Church.

One of these future metropolitans was Josyf Sembratovyc. He was born in the Lemko Region village of Krynica in present-day southeastern Poland, where his father was the local Greek Catholic parish priest. The young Josyf was sent to the Jesuit College in nearby Nowy Sącz for his basic education. From there he went on to the Central Greek Catholic Seminary in the imperial capital of Vienna as well as to the University of Vienna from where he received a doctorate in theology in 1850. Two years later, he was appointed prefect and vice-rector of the Vienna Greek Catholic Seminary until 1859, when he returned to Galicia to serve as professor of classical Greek and the New Testament at the University of L'viv. It was during this period that the young devoted teacher and priest made a strong impression on two politically influential Galician aristocratic families, the polonized Greek Catholic Sapiehas and Dzieduszyckis.

Such friendships were to help advance Sembratovyc's career. In 1865, he was consecrated a bishop and two years later was appointed auxiliary to the eparchy of Przemysł. Then, in 1870, at the relatively young age of 49, he was named metropolitan of the Greek Catholic Church in L'viv. At that time, the Greek Catholic Church was still the most important political and social as well as religious institution representing the East Slavic Rus’ population of Galicia. It is not surprising, therefore, that Metropolitan Sembratovyc was to be drawn into all aspects of his people’s lives.

The new metropolitan was, in particular, concerned with reducing widespread alcoholism and controlling the educational system within his ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Both policies, however, were met with resistance by the local Polish landowning nobility. But it was problems directly related to his own people that proved to be most difficult for Sembratovyc to solve. The second half of the nineteenth century in Austria Galicia coincided with the rise of nationalism. Among the local East Slavic populace who called themselves Rusyns and who were virtually all of the Greek Catholic faith, controversy arose regarding national identity. Most leaders followed the orientation of the Greek Catholic metropolitane of L'viv epitomized by Sembratovyc himself. They were known as Old Ruthenians (starorusyny), which meant they were loyal subjects of the Habsburg Empire with a distinct Greek Catholic Rus’ culture whose survival depended on the continued existence of Austria-Hungary. Other leaders, however—and this included priests as well as laymen—began to identify as Ukrainians and associate with those whom they considered to be their brethren living in the neighboring southern regions of what was then the Russian Empire. Still other leaders rejected all ideas of either Greek Catholic Rusyn or of Ukrainian national distinctiveness and instead felt themselves to be part of one single Russian nationality (obščerusskij narod). These Russophiles also favored a “return to Orthodoxy” and eventually expected the Russian Empire to annex Galicia. The Austrian government as well as Galicia’s ruling Polish circles were naturally quite concerned about any national orientation that looked eastward for its salvation.

Metropolitan Sembratovyc, whose own Old Ruthenian and pro-Habsburg convictions were never questioned, was caught in the middle of the nationality problem. The same Galician-Polish aristocratic leaders who had supported him earlier in his career now blamed him for losing control of the situation. In particular, they were angered because of the participation of some of his priests in the “return to Orthodoxy” movement that in 1875 resulted in the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church in the Chern region just north of Galicia as well as the acceptance in 1882 of Orthodoxy by the village of Hnylyčyki located in Sembratovyc’s own Galician metropolitane. The Hnylyčyki affair convinced the Austrian emperor Franz Joseph to demand Sembratovyc’s resignation as metropolitan, a decision which the Vatican accepted.

Stripped of his hierarchical post, Sembratovyc moved to Rome where he spent the remaining years of his life. Despite his career in the highest echelons of the Greek Catholic Church, Sembratovyc never forgot his native Lemko Region. He reconsecrated the church in his native Krynica; he continued to help maintain the familial dynasty of Sembratovyc priests; and most important, he provided substantial financial support to the Rusyn boarding school (Rus‘ka Bursa) in Nowy Sącz which assisted in the education of young Lemko Rusyns.

Throughout his life, Metropolitan Josyf Sembratovyc remained a symbol of Old Ruthenian culture and identity, the orientation to which incidentally the present-day Lemko Rusyn national revival traces its roots. In the second half of the nineteenth century, however, there seemed to be little place for Old Ruthenianism in Austrian Galicia where a fierce struggle was raging among partisans of the Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian nationalities.

Philip Michaels
CARPATHO-RUSYNs: THEIR CURRENT STATUS AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES

The following report was prepared at the request of the Institute for East-West Security Studies in New York City for a conference on European Institutions and the Protection of National Minorities in East Central Europe and the Balkans that was held at Střín Castle, near Prague, in former Czechoslovakia on October 10-13, 1991. One month later, in November 1991, the report was revised and delivered at a special session on Rusyns in another conference called National Minorities and Politics, held in Bratislava under the sponsorship of the European Foundation.

The presentation by Professor Magocsi provoked a spirited response in the press of Ukraine and in Ukrainian-language newspapers in Slovakia and Poland. An entire brochure entitled Political Rusynism in Practice, by Mykola Mušynka, was devoted to Professor Magocsi’s report and its supposed “anti-Ukrainian character.” Ukrainian newspapers and journals refused to publish the report by Professor Magocsi, while the brochure attacking his views was reprinted in thousands of copies in Kiev, Prešov, and Toronto.

In contrast, the Ethnographic Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Bratislava published in its journal Slovensky národopis, Nos. 2 and 3 (1992) a Slovak translation of the Magocsi report with commentaries from the Slovak (L’udovi’ Haraksim), Ukrainian (Mykola Mušynka—different from his brochure statements), and Polish (Andrzej Zieba) perspectives followed by a response by the author. Together this material comprises perhaps the best discussion of the present Rusyn problem in Europe.

In this issue of the Carpatho-Rusyn American we publish the text (without notes and references) of the Magocsi report. Subsequent issues will include the three commentaries and the author’s response.—Editor

Who Are The Rusyns?

In 1875, geographers from the old Hungarian Kingdom erected a monument in a remote region of their country that carried the following inscription: “Precise instruments have erected a monument in a remote region of their country that has been used by the East Slavic inhabitants of the Carpathian region to describe themselves.” Just over a century later, in 1977, the former Soviet authorities, who had by then ruled the area, erected a second monument to mark the center of the continent that stretches from the Arctic shores of Norway in the north to the beaches of Crete in the south, and from the coast of Ireland in the west to the Ural Mountains in the east. The precise center where the monuments are located is near the village of Dilove (formerly Trebušany) in the foothills of the north-central Carpathian Mountains that from time immemorial has been inhabited by an East Slavic people called Carpatho-Rusyns, or simply Rusyns (sometimes in English: Ruthenians). Thus, in geographic terms, the Rusyns are not a peripheral group, but rather one whose homeland—Carpathian Rus’—is located literally in the heart of Europe.

According to present-day international boundaries, Rusyns live in more or less compact territory within the boundaries of three countries: Ukraine, Slovakia, and Poland. There is also a small group of Rusyns in Yugoslavia, descendants of immigrants who left the Carpathian homeland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In theory, the number of Rusyns could be as high as 1.2 million people. This includes 977,000 in the Transcarpathian oblast (former Subcarpathian Rus’) of the Ukraine; 130,000 in the Prešov Region of northeastern Slovakia; 80,000 in the Lemko Region of southeastern Poland as well as in other parts of that country; And 30,000 in the Vojvodina (Bačka) and the Croatian republic of former Yugoslavia.

The Problem of Nomenclature

It is important to keep in mind what is meant by the term Rusyn. Traditionally, the name Rusyn, or its local variant Rusnak, has been used by the East Slavic inhabitants of the Carpathian region to describe themselves. However, by the twentieth century, in particular its second half, the historic names Rusyn/Rusnak were replaced by others, such as Ukrainian in Soviet Transcarpathia and the Prešov Region of Slovakia, or Lemko in Poland. There are also Rusyns who have given up identifying with any East Slavic group, and instead associate with the dominant nationality of the country in which they live, such as Polish in Poland or Slovak in Slovakia. These changes in national self-designation have in some cases come gradually, prompted either by intellectual conviction or by national assimilation, especially among families of nationally-mixed parentage. In the latter case, children often choose to identify—or are identified by their parents—with the dominant state nationality, Slovak or Polish.

More often, however, the change in nomenclature has been the result of governmental decree in which the name Rusyn was banned from official usage, as was the case after 1945 in Soviet Transcarpathia and Poland and by the early 1950s in Czechoslovakia. The result is that today one can find within the same ethnolinguistic group, within the same village, in some cases even within the same family, people who will identify as a Rusyn, or a Lemko, or a Ukrainian, or a Slovak, or a Pole. Moreover, in the case of the East Slavic designations —Rusyn/Rusnak, Lemko, Ukrainian—some people consider these as synonyms, others as mutually-exclusive terms. In other words, some people will say that Rusyn is simply the older historic name for Ukrainian, and that Lemko is a regional name of Ukrainian, while others are convinced that the names Lemko or Rusnak are regional forms for Rusyn which, in turn, designates a people that is distinct from the Ukrainian and every other surrounding nationality.

It should be noted that the estimated figure of 1.2 million Rusyns given above refers to all people of the same linguistic and ethnographic origin, regardless of how they designate themselves on documents such as internal identity papers, passports, or decennial censuses. Our concern here will be primarily with the present-day Rusyn movement or with that portion of the group (the precise numbers are unknown) that considers Rusyns to comprise a distinct people.

Historical Background

It is neither possible nor appropriate to provide here an extensive outline of Rusyn history. It is necessary, however, to keep a few historical factors in mind in order to comprehend the current situation.

Rusyns never had their own state or political independence. Since the Middle Ages, the Rusyn homeland was ruled by Hungary and Poland or Austria. Nonetheless, during the past century and a half, they have at various times been recognized by neighboring or ruling states as having the right to a territorial entity whose existence was justified on the grounds that it was somehow of and for Rusyns and that it would have some degree of autonomy or self-rule. The first experience in this regard came in late 1849, when in the wake of the failure of the Hungarian revolution, the Austrian government divided Hungary into five military and several civil districts. One of the civil districts (Ungvár/Úzhhorod) was based in the Subcarpathian region and administered by local Rusyn political and cultural activists. This experiment was to last only a few months.
Much more important was the period of political upheaval that followed World War I. At that time, in an effort to retain Rusyn-inhabited lands within Hungary, the new government in Budapest created, in December 1918, an autonomous Rusyn Land (Rus’ka Krajina) that continued to function even after a pro-Soviet Communist regime came to power in March 1919. Simultaneously, the recently-founded Czechoslovak government was also courting the Rusyns, offering them a self-governing province to be called Rusinsko (Rusisnia), or Subcarpathian Rus’ (Podkarpat斯ka Rus’), if they would join the Czechs and Slovaks in their new state. In May 1919, the Rusyns accepted the Czechoslovak offer. Most significantly, the Rusyn issue had reached the international political forum, so that “the fullest degree of self-government” for “Ruthene territory south of the Carpathians” was guaranteed by two international treaties at the Paris Peace Conference (St. Germain-en-Laye, September 10, 1919, and Trianon, June 4, 1920) and by the Czechoslovak constitution (February 29, 1920).

For the next two decades the vast majority of Rusyns—approximately three-fourths the total number at the time—lived in Subcarpathian Rus, a territory that was Rusyn in name, that had its own Rusyn schools, and that had all the trappings of self-rule including a governor, a partially-elected diet, a national anthem, and a national theater. Finally, in late 1938, actual autonomy was granted to Subcarpathian Rus’ (by then renamed Carpatho-Ukraine). Not only had autonomy been demanded by local politicians, it was also one of the provisions of the infamous Munich Pact, which led to the restructuring of Czechoslovakia. The Carpatho-Ukraine was to function for nearly half a year until the complete liquidation of what remained of Czechoslovakia in March 1939.

The twentieth century also witnessed three short-lived efforts at Rusyn independence. The first of these came in 1919, when after being unsuccessful in their bid to join fellow Rusyns south of the mountains, the Lemkos living in the former Austrian province of Galicia created an independent republic that functioned for sixteen months before its government was arrested in March 1920, by the authorities of Poland, which became the new ruler over Rusyn lands north of the Carpathians. At the same time, along the eastern edge of Subcarpathian territory a regional ethnic group known as Hutsuls established their own republic which lasted four months (February-June 1919) before being driven out by troops from Romania. The last unsuccessful attempt came two decades later, when the Carpatho-Ukrainian autonomous government declared symbolically its independence on the last day of Czechoslovakia’s existence (March 15, 1939) before the province was invaded and reannexed to Hungary. The point is that although Rusyns may never have had their own state, they did have for a significant period of time in the twentieth century the experience—and therefore historical memory—of their own political entity, Subcarpathian Rus’, which was recognized both by the state in which they lived (Czechoslovakia) and by the international community (Paris Peace Conference, League of Nations).

Although the Rusyn homeland is located in the geographical center of Europe, it is at the same time along a cultural borderland. It is along that great divide between the Catholic West and Orthodox East, what Riccardo Picchio has classified in the broadest cultural terms as Slavica romana and Slavica orthodoxa. Located where they are, this division has had a profound effect on the Rusyn psyche.

The very language or series of dialects that Rusyns speak reflect the influences of both cultural spheres. Thus, while their speech clearly belongs to the realm of East Slavic languages, much of their vocabulary, pronunciational stress, and even syntax is West Slavic.

The cultural divide is most graphically evident in what is for traditional Rusyn culture the all-important factor of religion. Some Rusyns are Orthodox, but the majority, at least during the past two centuries, is Catholic, or more precisely Greek Catholic. These confessional differences reflect a whole mind-set that is either western- or eastern-oriented. The eastern mind-set tends to surrender the self to fate in the hope that the Christian God and his intercessors, Christ and the Virgin Mary, might somehow alleviate the burdens of this earthly life. In contrast, the western mind-set seems to feel that if an individual receives education or political training, he or she can somehow put their lives in order and, therefore, be able to have some control over destiny.

The east-west dichotomy in the Rusyn psyche also impinges on attitudes toward national identity. The eastern orientation tends to think in universalistic terms and be satisfied with viewing Rusyns as part of a single East Slavic Orthodox religious and cultural world. The western orientation—epitomized by the very distinctiveness of Greek Catholics from other Catholics—accepts the idea of national and linguistic particularity. Universalism versus particularism are attitudes that greatly influenced Rusyn political and cultural leaders, especially regarding the nationality question.

Being a stateless people, Rusyns have had, at least until the second half of the twentieth century, to depend on their leaders, the intelligentsia, to determine the precise direction of their national revival. The Rusyn national revival began during the second half of the nineteenth century and culminated during the interwar years, by which time it had evolved into a comprehensive movement concerned with political, cultural, and social issues. Most of the nationalist intelligentsia did agree on one basic premise: that Rusyns are East Slavs and that their linguistic and cultural traditions were based in the east, albeit with pronounced western influences. What they could not agree upon, however, was whether Rusyns were a branch of the Russian nationality, or of the Ukrainian nationality, or whether they formed a distinct fourth East Slavic Rusyn nationality. Not surprisingly, debates about national and linguistic orientation quickly became caught up in local partisan politics. Politicians had their own agendas, and they more often than not made opportunistic use of the nationality question in order to promote party or other ideological interests.

As for the nationalist intelligentsia, they easily fulfilled the precepts of all activists in the formative stages of national movements. Namely, they had no difficulty using history to formulate an ideology that was able to convince people they were either Russian, Ukrainian, or Rusyn. The debate over the national orientation of the Rusyns was not yet resolved before the outbreak of World War II, despite the achievements during the interwar years of the Ukrainian orientation in the largest Rusyn territory, Subcarpathian Rus’ (Carpatho-Ukraine).

In a sense, the year 1939 marked an end to the natural evolution of discussions about a Rusyn nationality. This is because beginning in that year and lasting for half a century, the nationality debate was effectively stifled by state intervention. This happened first under fascist regimes in Hungary (which reannexed Subcarpathian Rus’), in Slovakia (which retained the Prešov Region), and in the German-ruled Generalgouvernement (which ruled the Lemko Region); and then as a result of Soviet rule after 1945, whether directly in Subcarpathian Rus’ (renamed Transcarpathian Ukraine) or through pro-Soviet Communist governments in Poland and Czechoslovakia. As is well known, the Communist era with
its anti-democratic approach to the nationality question was to last until the revolutions of 1989 and 1991. The only exception was the case of the small group of Rusyns in the Vojvodina region of Yugoslavia. Although a Communist regime was installed in their land as well, the Yugoslav government allowed the Vojvodian Rusyns to decide their own national orientation.

This was not to be the case for the Rusyns living in the Carpathian homeland. In short, the Soviet regime declared that further debate was unnecessary because the nationality question had supposedly been resolved long ago. Based on a decision made by the Communist party (Bolshevik) of the Ukraine taken in December 1925, all Rusyns, regardless what they may have called themselves, were declared to be Ukrainians. Any who opposed the Ukrainian viewpoint were accused of having “anti-historical” and, therefore, “anti-Soviet” opinions; they were forcibly removed from their homes; and they might even have been arrested as “counterrevolutionaries.” Closely connected with these developments was the liquidation first in Soviet Transcarpathia (1949) and then in Czechoslovakia (1950) of the Greek Catholic Church, which by the mid-twentieth century had become the stronghold of the Rusyn orientation.

When Communist regimes were established in Poland (1945) and Czechoslovakia (1948), they adapted the Soviet line and decreed that the Rusyn minorities within their borders were Ukrainians. They forbade Rusyn publications and the use of the name Rusyn in official documents. The situation was particularly bad in Poland. Not only were the Lemko Rusyns declared to be Ukrainians, they were forcibly deported in masse from their Carpathian homeland in 1947 and scattered throughout the former German lands of post-1945 western and northern Poland.

It is ironic to note the advantages that accrued to the governments in question through their use—or, more properly, misuse—of the name Ukrainian. For example, by declaring that the population was Ukrainian, this allowed the Soviet Union to justify the annexation in 1945 of Subcarpathian Rus’, a territory that throughout the war it had agreed should be returned to Czechoslovakia. Nationalist ideology could now conveniently serve Stalin’s political designs on the international stage. In any case, how could the Soviet worker’s state refuse the request of fellow “Ukrainian workers” in Transcarpathia who “voluntarily” were demanding to be united with the “Mother Ukraine”?

In neighboring Poland, identification of Lemkos as Ukrainians made it easier for the government to deport them, since the Communist Polish government argued that, as “Ukrainians,” the Lemkos were helping the anti-Communist Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) under Stepan Bandera, which was held up in the Carpathians and still fighting the Polish and Soviet authorities after the end of World War II. South of the mountains in Czechoslovakia, the administrative imposition of a Ukrainian identity beginning in 1952 proved to be advantageous to those Slovaks who had always claimed that “their Rusnaks” were really “Slovaks of the Greek Catholic faith.” In essence, forced Ukrainianization (combined with the liquidation of the local Greek Catholic Church and forced collectivization of peasant land) led during the 1950s and 1960s to the most rapid degree of Slovakization and national assimilation that Rusyns had ever experienced. It is nonetheless true that during this same period, the Czechoslovak government provided extensive funding to create a wide range of cultural organizations that were Ukrainian in national form but socialist in content. A well-paid local Ukrainian intelligentsia was even able to attain several significant scholarly and literary achievements. However, this had little real effect upon the Rusyn peasant masses in Slovakia. For them, the choice was simple: if one could not be a Rusyn, better declare oneself a Slovak than a Ukrainian (which among other things was associated with the hated East).

Once again Yugoslavia was the exception. The government there provided both funding and legal guarantees, while the local intelligentsia decided to adopt a Rusyn orientation and to develop the local speech into a sociologically-complete Rusyn literary language. In fact, Rusyns became one of the five official nationalities in the autonomous province of the Vojvodina.

Yet Yugoslavia was the exception that proved the rule. And the rule was that after 1945, Rusyns ceased to exist. All Soviet, Czechoslovak, and Polish documents and publications referred to the population only as Ukrainian. Publications in the West, both by Ukrainian émigré and North American Soviet and East European specialists, also accepted the view that Rusyns did not exist. or to quote the New Columbia Encyclopedia (1975): “There is no ethnic or linguistic distinction between Ukrainians and Ruthenians [Rusyns].” “The majority of the population [of Transcarpathia] is Ukrainian.”

The Current Situation

Then came the 1980s. The first signs of change came in Poland, where the Lemko Rusyns—both those who were dispersed in the “West” of that country as well as about 10,000 who had managed to return to the Carpathian homeland—began to gather at annual cultural festivals. These “unofficial” festivals received no government financial support, but by the same token they were not under any ideological control. As a result, the Lemkos began to revive the idea that they were neither Poles nor Ukrainians, but rather part of a distinct Slavic people closely related to Rusyns living south of the mountains in Slovakia. The Lemkos seemed to be acting in isolation and for several years that was, indeed, the case.

Later came the changes brought about by the November 1989 Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia. New initiative committees were founded that were often dominated by individuals who had not been associated with the Communist regime. At first, the initiative committees tried to transform (they would say democratize) the older Ukrainian organizations, but when that failed they established their own Rusyn organizations and publications.

At the very same time, in neighboring Transcarpathia, the first Rusyn-oriented organization to exist anywhere in Carpathian Rus’ since World War II was established in February 1990 in the oblast’s administrative center of Uzhhorod. Known as the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns (Tovarystvo Karpat’ans’kykh Rusyniv) and with branches throughout Transcarpathia, its goals were at first of a cultural and ecological nature—to promote and preserve knowledge of local history and customs. But before long, the Society moved on to political demands, in particular the recognition of Rusyns as a distinct nationality and the return of the autonomous status of Subcarpathian Rus’, a status which they argued was illegally taken away in 1945.

Before 1990 came to a close, a total of five new Rusyn organizations had come into existence where Rusyns live. Aside from the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns in Ukrainian Transcarpathia were the Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusyns’ka Obroda) in Medzilaborce, Czechoslovakia (est. March 1990); the Lemko Association (Stovaryšnyja Lemkiv) in Legnica, Poland (est. April 1990); the Society of Friends of Subcarpathian Rus’ (Společnost pfátel
Podkarpatské Rusí in Prague (est. October 1990); and the Ruska Matka (Rusyn Matka) in Ruski Kerestur, Yugoslavia (est. December 1990). By the spring of 1991, a sixth one was established, this time in Hungary: the Rusyn Organization in Hungary (Magyarországi Ruszinok Szervezete) in Budapest (est. May 1991). Most of these organizations have their own Rusyn-language newspaper or magazine, or they have access to existing publications. All five organizations have put forth basically the same demands: that Rusyns be recognized as a distinct nationality; that a Rusyn literary language be codified and eventually be used in schools as a medium of instruction; and that Rusyns be guaranteed full rights as a national minority in the countries where they live or, in the case of Transcarpathia, that Rusyns be recognized as the dominant indigenous nationality.

As in all new or revived movements, the Rusyn orientation must first be able to make itself known to the constituency it purports to represent. This is inherently problematic, because with the exception of Yugoslavia, nowhere do Rusyns control the local media. Their message, or at least an awareness of their movement's existence, has been helped less by their own publications than by the fierce polemics that have filled the non-Rusyn press in Poland, former Czechoslovakia, and most especially former Soviet Transcarpathia. This is because from the moment the first Rusyn activity began, local pro-Ukrainian activists attacked the Rusyn orientation as "anachronistic," "ahistorical," "unenlightened," "in the service of American imperialists," and "treacherous" to the Ukrainian nation. As a result, more attention of a semi-sensationalist journalistic nature was given the Rusyn problem than might otherwise have been the case. The Czech and Slovak press also paid much—although more rational—attention to the Rusyn-Ukrainian debate, especially in the context of the nationality question that concerned Czechoslovak society as a whole.

Whatever latent isolation Rusyn leaders in their respective countries may have still felt was overcome in March 1991, when, at the initiative of the Rusyn Renaissance Society, the first World Congress of Rusyns was convened in Medzilaborce, Czechoslovakia. Indeed, despite a history of interaction between Rusyn communities in the homeland as well as the immigration in America during the twentieth century, this was, in fact, the first time representatives from all countries where Rusyns live (Ukraine, Slovakia, 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.

It is interesting to note that one week after the congress took place, Czechoslovakia conducted its decennial census in which people for the first time since World War II had the right to answer that they were of Rusyn nationality. Despite problems with the manner in which the nationality question was asked and subsequently clarified, in Slovakia 17,000 persons responded they were Rusyns as compared to 14,000 Ukrainians. This raises the question of numbers. Observers will legitimately ask just how many people identify as Rusyns? And even among those who do respond Rusyn, does use of such a term necessarily mean they are denying a possible simultaneous identification as Ukrainians? At this point, there is no way to know the precise answers to those questions. All we know is that in Slovakia, when given a chance in March 1991, of those people of East Slavic background who did not identify as Slovak and who had the choice between a Rusyn or Ukrainian identity, 55 percent chose Rusyn. As for the number of Rusyns in Poland and Ukrainian Transcarpathia, we simply do not know at this stage, nor do we have any indications—such as census data, scientific polling, or membership in political parties—that might help to provide a reasonable estimate.

What we can be certain of, however, is that after forty years of Communist rule, Rusyns have not gone away. Today, there are Rusyn organizations, Rusyn publications, and a relatively wide range of writers, teachers, professionals, and peasants who continue to articulate in the press and at public manifestations their belonging to a distinct Rusyn people.

Protection for Rusyns in the Future

As with many minorities, the future of their survival depends on the willingness of the governments in the states where they live to provide them with adequate legal protection and perhaps financial assistance for their national development. In this regard, the Rusyns need to inform and constantly remind the international community that they exist. In turn, Rusyns should be able to expect that the international community will monitor their status and, if necessary, put pressure on governments in Ukraine, Slovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia, in order to ensure that their national rights are protected.

In fact, all four states in which Rusyns live have already ratified several agreements pertaining to national minorities at recent meetings of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). Of particular importance for Rusyns were the decisions reached in June 1990 at the Copenhagen meeting of the CSCE. At Copenhagen it was agreed that "to belong to a national minority is a matter of a person's individual choice and no disadvantage may arise from the exercise of such choice." Moreover, "persons belonging to national minorities can exercise and enjoy their rights individually as well as in community with other members of their group."

This means that regardless how scholars or governments might define Rusyns, if there are individuals and/or groups who call themselves by that name and who believe they constitute a distinct nationality, they have a right to do so and to be recognized as Rusyns by the governments of the countries in which they live. The Copenhagen agreement also recognized the role of non-governmental organizations in promoting the interests of national minorities, and it called on the participating states to assure that the teaching of history and culture in the educational establishments "will also take account of the history and culture of national minorities."

At a follow-up CSCE meeting in Geneva (July 1991), member states accepted the provisions of a special report which guaranteed the right of national minorities to participate in non-governmental organizations outside their country of residence. The report reaffirmed as well the principle that individuals or organizations representing national minorities be allowed "unimpeded contacts . . . across frontiers . . . with persons with whom they share a common ethnic or national origin."

Finally, at the most recent CSCE meeting held in Moscow (September-October 1991), member states reaffirmed the agreements reached at all previous meetings and agreed further that "commitments undertaken in the field of the human dimension of the CSCE [including those pertaining to national minorities] are matters of direct legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned."
propositions are little more than the speculations of individ­
uals who define themselves as Rusyns in the sense of a na­
dionally distinct from Ukrainians. Such people should have
the right to declare themselves in their passports and inter­
nal documents as Rusyns, and the state census bureau should
publish data on the number of persons who identify as Rusyns
and other agreements on national minorities outlined above.

Before looking specifically at what Rusyns need in each
country to protect and guarantee their future existence, it is
necessary to clarify the issue of international boundaries. In
the Carpathian homeland, Rusyns live within the borders of
three states, and in the past two years there has been discus­sion in the Czech, Slovak, and Transcarpathian press that cer­
tain political activists are demanding the return of Ukraine's Transcarpathian oblast (historic Subcarpathian Rus') to Czechoslovakia. There has even been some talk that Transcarpathia might be returned to Hungary or divided be­tween Hungary and Czechoslovakia. In fact, most of these pro­positions are little more than the speculations of individuals who have been blown out of proportion by political rivals and by journalists seeking to report a good story. The Czecho-Slovak federal government publicly declared that it ''cannot be concerned with the fate’' of Transcarpathia. As for the Rusyn organizations that have come into existence in 1990, none of them nor the World Congress of Rusyns that met in 1991 has voiced any demand for border changes. On the contrary, all the new organizations as well as the vast majority of Rusyn spokespersons wherever they live warn against tampering with existing international boundaries.

On the other hand, the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns in
Transcarpathia has called openly for the return of the status
of autonomy that Subcarpathian Rus' did enjoy during the
interwar years. In order to determine the views of the loc­
al population, the society, joined by other minority organiza­tions, called for a question on Transcarpathian autonomy to be added to the referendum on Ukrainian independence that was held on December 1, 1991. There was a large voter turn­out, with 92.6 percent favoring Ukrainian independence and 78 percent self-rule for Transcarpathia. The issue of Transcarpathian autonomy elicited great interest in neighboring countries, although this is, in fact, an internal issue for
whatever kind of government and state structure is finally
established in what until recently was the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. In short, Transcarpathia has been and should for the foreseeable future remain a part of Ukraine.

However, as a sovereign member of the international com­
munity, Ukraine must, in turn, guarantee the individual and
corporate rights of Rusyns—or those citizens of Ukraine who
wish to call themselves Rusyns. It is true that the Ukrainian
government has already provided guarantees for national minorities living on its territory: Russians, Jews, Poles, Ger­
mans, Tatars, etc. To this list must be added Rusyns. This
would mean that the "official," or one might say traditional,
Ukrainian view of the Rusyns has to change. Namely, Ukrainian authorities must accept the fact that within its bound­aries, primarily in its Transcarpathian oblast, there are people who define themselves as Rusyns in the sense of a na­tionality distinct from Ukrainians. Such people should have
the right to declare themselves in their passports and inter­
nal documents as Rusyns, and the state census bureau should
publish data on the number of persons who identify as Rusyns
and not simply classify them—as has been done until now—as Ukrainians. If such guarantees are provided, there is no reason why Rusyns in Transcarpathia could not remain Rusyns as well as function as full-fledged citizens of a sovereign and democratic Ukrainian state. Indeed, independent Ukraine has recently become a member of the Con­ference in Security and Cooperation in Europe, which obliges it to accept and implement the principles of the Copenhagen
and other agreements on national minorities outlined above.

Following the trend that has taken hold in the former Soviet
Union, it would seem desirable that the new Ukrainian state
become a decentralized entity in which each of its compo­
nent regions would have a large degree of autonomy in
economic and cultural matters. Thus, questions such as what
language might be taught in elementary schools, or what kind
of national orientation should be adopted by regional cultural
and educational institutions, or what amount of funding might
be given to Rusyn-oriented groups, are all decisions that
would be made by the people's assembly in Uzhhorod and not in Kiev. Of course, it goes without saying that the free
movement of peoples across borders with neighboring Rusyn
gerions in Slovakia and Poland must be guaranteed. Fortu­
antly, this possibility exists already, albeit with a waiting
time at border crossings that every day of the week averages
between 15 and 20 hours.

As for neighboring Slovakia, the situation of Rusyns,
especially since the November 1989 Velvet Revolution, is
much better than in either Ukrainian Transcarpathia or
Poland. However, until now the Slovak government (gener­
ally through its Ministry of Culture) and the former Czecho­
Slovak federal government (through allotment of discre­tionary funds) have provided only ad hoc grants to the new
Rusyn organizations and publications. The normal budgetary
allocments of the Slovak government intended for its East
Slavic Rusyn/Ukrainian minority go to the Union of Rusyn-
Ukrainians of Czechoslovakia (SRÚC), that is, to the
Ukrainian-oriented cultural organization that is the direct
descendant (still with largely the same leadership) as the
formerly Communist-dominated Cultural Union of Ukrain­
ian Workers (KSÚT). Slovak government funding through
other ministries also supports in Prešov several Ukrainian
university departments and institutes at Šafárik University,
a Ukrainian radio station, and a Ukrainian publishing house,
as well as the Museum of Ukrainian Culture (recently renam­
ed the Aleksander Pavlovyč Regional Museum) in Svidník.
Of the organizations receiving a normal budgetary allotment, only the Aleksander Duchnovič Theater (formerly the
Ukrainian National Theater) is of a Rusyn orientation.

The Slovak government must recognize that there are two
clearly-defined national orientations—Rusyn and Ukrainian
—and that if support for national minorities is to continue
in Slovakia, then the authorities must provide funding for
Rusyn as well as Ukrainian organizations. But how should
the government divide a financial allotment among its East
Slavic minority, which until recently has been designated only
as Ukrainian? Initially, it would seem that the only reasonable
way would be to accept the percentages revealed in the results
of the 1991 census, which would mean 55 percent of the
budget to Rusyn cultural organizations, schools, and the
media, and 45 percent to Ukrainian cultural organizations,
schools, and the media.

The question of schools in Slovakia is particularly prob­
lematic, because beginning in the 1960s the language of in­
struction in the vast majority of Rusyn-inhabited villages was
changed—at the request of parents themselves—from Ukrai­
nian to Slovak. Moreover, as part of a consolidation pro­
cess during the past two decades, many small elementary
schools in Rusyn-inhabited villages were closed. Even if
private or public elementary schools will be reopened in
Rusyn villages, it is likely that Slovak will be the language
of instruction. However, the Slovak ministry of education
must provide teachers and textbooks in Rusyn or in Ukrai­
nian for those villages this may submit such requests. Most
important, the standard Slovak-language history textbooks
used throughout Slovakia should include an adequate
discussion of the history and culture of Rusyns and other
minorities which be of benefit to all students. This would
be in keeping with the CSCE agreement in Copenhagen,
which—along with “other international treaties of human
rights and freedoms”—are, according to the new constitution
of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, "universally binding on its territory and supercede its own laws."

The Rusyns, or Lemko Rusyns of Poland perhaps need the most help. Not only is the majority of Lemko Rusyns scattered throughout the western and northern regions of Poland, but their fledgling pro-Rusyn organization, the Lemko Association with its amateur theatrical troupe, and the older Lemkovyna folk ensemble receive no financial support at all from the Polish government, either in the form of an annual budgetary allotment or ad hoc grants. Whatever government funds assigned to national minority cultural activity are given to the Union of Ukrainians in Poland (Ob’jednannja Ukrainjciniv Pol’skij), the direct descendant of the Communist dominated Ukrainian Socio-Cultural Society (USKT). Support for the new Union of Ukrainians must continue, especially since most Ukrainians in Poland are not originally from nor do they live in the Carpathian region. On the other hand, Lemko Rusyns must also be recognized as a distinct national minority and receive a fair share of funding.

How to determine what is a "fair share" will, of course, be difficult, since Poland does not even have nationality as a category on its decennial census questionnaires. Perhaps a referendum attached to the next national vote could include a question that lists all the national groups in Poland and asks the respondent to which one he/she would wish to assign a portion of their taxes for cultural activity. This would be somewhat similar to municipalities in Canada that ask their residents to indicate whether they want their tax dollars to be assigned to public schools or to private (Catholic) schools. Whatever the mechanism decided upon, in keeping with its commitments as a member state of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, the Polish government is obliged to recognize Lemko Rusyns as a distinct national minority and to provide funding for Lemko cultural organizations and Lemko-language schools in those communities that demand them.

Lastly, we turn to the situation in Yugoslavia. Ever since World War II, the Yugoslav policy of equality for its six component republics and support for the national minorities that live within them has encouraged the Croatian Republic and, in particular, the Vojvodina Autonomous Region of the Serbian Republic to finance liberally Rusyn cultural and educational activity. It is to be expected that when the republics of Yugoslavia sort out their present difficulties, the republics of Croatia and, in particular, Serbia will continue their judicious support and protection of their respective Rusyn minorities.

Conclusion

The Rusyns are one example of the many groups who suffered under the totalitarian regimes imposed on East Central Europe during the past four decades. Now that those regimes no longer exist, there is a real opportunity to correct past injustices and to assure the future survival of the Rusyns. It is, after all, in the interest of all four countries where Rusyns live—Ukraine, Slovakia, Poland, and Yugoslavia—to become part of the larger European community. The way in which those countries resolve the Rusyn issue will, in part, determine to what degree they are ready for membership in the new Europe.

Paul Robert Magocsí
Toronto, Ontario

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Winter 1992 issue of the Carpatho-Rusyn American is notable not just because it marks the completion of fifteen years of publication, but because it gives us a glimpse of the complex situation our people always seem to find themselves in and the characteristic timidity with which we seem to face all challenges and opportunities.

In a reprint of a letter by Paul R. Magocsí to Bishop Losten of the Ukrainian Catholic church, we have what should be a blistering attack on Ukrainian Catholic chauvinism and the nonfeasance of Greek Catholic leadership here and in Europe—but Magocsí’s response turns out to be simply an exercise in academic and diplomatic politeness. It’s a new world, Professor Magocsí, and you can stop pulling your punches.

From the clerical side, the Reverend Luke Mihaly talks all around the problems with and between our respective Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches. The blame is placed on outside forces, on the Rusyn people for not taking responsibility, and finally on the erosion of “...the trust that certainly once existed...” But when did any trust exist? Tell it straight, Father Luke. The problem with our churches is that the bishops want to dance with everyone but the girl who brought them.

The most disturbing evidence of the timidity of those in whom our people have placed their trust comes, however, from Vasyli Turok. You quote him as speaking as chairman of the Rusyn Renaissance Society and saying for all Rusyns in Slovakia, “Together with the Slovak people, we Rusyns wish to build our common republic without making any political demands.” What kind of leadership is that?

If our people are to prosper in the new world we face, organizations such as the Rusyn Renaissance Society and its leaders had better be risk takers, staking out political positions and making political demands in order to rally the Rusyn people to the cause of their own survival and renewal. Who is to lead the Rusyns in Slovakia if the Rusyn Renaissance Society stands on the sidelines—the church? History and contemporary events show that we cannot rely on our church leadership to serve anything but their own interests. They have shown themselves to be by and large enemies of the cause of Rusyn renewal here and in Slovakia. As for Ukraine, the jury is still out.

Our lay leaders, particularly in Europe, have to develop and manage issues and a political agenda which are both inspiring enough and broad based enough to rally Rusyns to the cause of their own survival. If Turok’s words reflect the true feelings and aspirations of the Rusyn leadership in Slovakia, there is little to hope for from that quarter.

It seems that our Rusyn kin in Ukraine, as exemplified by inspiring spokespersons like Volodymyr Fedynysynec’, are the ones to look to for charting a Rusyn future. They are apparently the only ones courageous enough to stand up and speak the truth in no uncertain terms. Except in the academic world, effective American-Rusyn leadership is virtually non-existent. In Slovakia, it appears that the agenda is to humbly eat the crumbs from the Slovak Roman Catholic table. In Transcarpathia, however, we have leaders who are willing to wade into the fray.

The business-as-usual attitude of Rusyn leadership in America and Slovakia means just that, business as usual—a long slow ride to nowhere. While the rallying cry in Uzhhorod seems to be, “Take no prisoners,” here and in Slovakia it is, “The Meek Shall Inherit the Earth.” History shows which approach wins out and where the latter has gotten us.

John Haluska
Fridley, Minnesota
INTERVIEW WITH SLOVAKIA’S AMBASSADOR

On March 1, 1992, the associate editor of the Carpatho-Rusyn American, Jerry Jumba, met with and interviewed Slovakia’s new ambassador to the United States, Dr. Milan Erban, during the ambassador’s visit to Pittsburgh.—Editor

JUMBA: Ambassador Erban, we American Rusyns are aware that since November 1989 the new Czech-Slovak government had given very fair treatment to the Rusyns of the Prešov Region. Will the new minister of culture in Slovakia continue to support all the national minorities with the same budget?

ERBAN: Yes, that’s true. The Rusyn people living in the territory of Slovakia have their own culture. They have their own theater and their own periodicals subsidized by the Slovak government. Of course, they also have their own school system—primary and secondary schools. There are not too many of those schools, but there are some.

JUMBA: Are Rusyns today recognized as a distinct national group?

ERBAN: Yes, they are.

JUMBA: I met Vasyl’ Turok, Chairman of the Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusyn’ska Obroda), in Prešov this summer and interviewed him. He expressed satisfaction with the status of the society’s relationship with the new Slovak Republic. He sang high praises for the new regime, but he is also concerned to know: Will the Slovak government, through the Ministry of Education, provide funding for a department (katedra) of Rusyn language and literature at Šafárik University?

ERBAN: Such praise is warranted because when our prime minister was recently asked whether we see ethnic minorities as a problem, he replied that rather than a problem, he looks at them as one of the resources of the country.

JUMBA: Will Slovakia’s state television and radio programs provide specific Rusyn programs in their studios?

ERBAN: They do provide such programs and will continue, although I’m not quite sure about the length of the broadcasting. It might be a couple of minutes a week. I’m not sure about the exact length.

JUMBA: In the United States, there are now Rusyn Americans who love to travel to Slovakia to see the homeland of their ancestors. Will the Slovak minister of culture encourage Rusyn-American tourists to spend their dollars in Slovakia?

ERBAN: Well, he certainly would, although I am not aware of his activity in this respect so far. But he certainly would enhance or encourage all people to come to Slovakia, because what my government wants to do is to transform Slovakia into an area or zone of prosperity and stability, to be able to attract as many tourists as possible of any ethnic origin, regardless whether or not they have roots in Slovakia.

JUMBA: Will the Slovak government continue its policy of changing village place names, specifically in Rusyn villages by dropping the adjectival prefix Rusky/Ruska/Ruske?

ERBAN: To be honest, I don’t know of any tendency towards abolishing place names.

JUMBA: When will the Slovak government publish the full results of the 1991 census, in particular the information about the use of the mother tongue?

ERBAN: I don’t see any reason why they shouldn’t.

JUMBA: At the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center we get many calls from Rusyn Americans who want to tour the Prešov Region in Eastern Slovakia, the Lemko Region in Poland, and Transcarpathia in Ukraine. We give many references to the Prešov Region, but those tourists have said that on previous tours they had Czech guides and in some cases Slovak guides who could not give them any information about Rusyns, and so they were disappointed. Can something be done to enhance Rusyn monuments and points of historical interest to attract these Rusyn-American tourists?

ERBAN: I imagine that something can be done, and if you can talk to our embassy directly we could try to be instrumental in this respect.

JUMBA: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Miková, Slovakia. The town hall of Miková, in cooperation with the Svidnik branch of the Rusyn Renaissance Society, will hold its Second Annual Festival of Carpatho-Rusyn Culture. Miková, which is located half way between Medzilaborce and Svidnik in northeastern Slovakia, is the native village of Andy Warhol’s parents. Aside from performances by traditional Rusyn folk ensembles, there will be an exhibit of paintings by Paul Warhola of Pittsburgh. For further information, contact: Andy Warhola Pop Art Club, Goldbergera M-15, 089 01 Svidnik, SLOVAKIA.

Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International in conjunction with the National Czech and Slovak Museum and Library is sponsoring its Third Genealogical/Cultural Conference October 28-31, 1993. The conference includes sessions on genealogical research, reasons for emigration, history, language, music, traditions and customs, travel, and folkcrafts, as well as an open house at the museum. For further information contact: The Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International, P.O. Box 16225, St. Paul, Minnesota 55116-0225 or the Czech and Slovak Museum and Library, P.O. Box 5398, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52406-5398.

Yonkers, New York. On June 20, 1993, a group of Rusyns, most of them recent immigrants in their 20s and 30s, met at the Lemko Hall in Yonkers to discuss the possibility of founding a new Rusyn community organization. The proposed new community organization would be nondenominational and act as a grassroots complement to the more scholarly oriented Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center.

A second meeting is tentatively scheduled for late August, at which the constitution, by-laws, and name of the organization will be discussed. The group welcomes inquiries from anyone interested in participating. For further information, please contact: Bogdan Horbal, 76 East 7th Street, Apt. 34, New York, New York 10003. Tel. 212-260-7463.

OUR FRONT COVER

Cartoon by Fedor Vico from the Rusyn-language newspaper, Narodny novynky, drawn for the opening of the Second World Congress of Rusyns in May 1993. Interviewer asks: “And who are you representing at this World Congress of Rusyns?” “Me, I’m a delegate from our Rusyn stepmotherland.”
RECENT EVENTS

Krynica, Poland. On May 22-23, 1993, the Second World Congress of Rusyns took place in Krynica, a resort and spa located high in the Carpathian Mountains within Poland’s Lemko Region. Hosted by the Society of Lemkos (Stovaryšnjia Lemkiv), the focus of the two-day congress was the present and future status of Rusyn culture and scholarship.

Although attendance was limited, as many as 125 to 150 delegates, observers, and media filled the auditorium of Krynica’s main spa center (Pijalnia Główna) to hear reports by the representatives of each national delegation as well as statements and greetings from other delegates and guests. The heads of each delegation included: Vasyl’ Sočka, vice-chairman, Society of Carpatho-Rusyns (Obščestvo Karpatkyh Rusynov), Ukraine; Vasyl’ Turok, chairman, Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusyn’ka Obroda), Slovakia; Dr. Paul Robert Magocsi, president, Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, United States; Andrij Kopča, chairman, Society of Lemkos (Stovaryšnjia Lemkiv), Poland; Natalja Dudaš, vice-chairman, Ruska Matka Society, Yugoslavia; and Gábor Hattinger, chairman, Organization of Rusyns in Hungary (Organizacija Rusinom u Mađarsku). The heads of the national delegations comprise together the permanent interregional committee of the World Congress, which is headed by Vasyl’ Turok. At the Second World Congress, the Organization of Rusyns in Hungary was added to the interregional committee for which Mr. Turok was re-elected chairman for another two-year term.

Most of the reports and statements discussed the many achievements of Rusyns in each country during the past two years, most especially the establishment of several new cultural and scholarly organizations and Rusyn-language publications. Other issues included concerns voiced by delegates from Ukraine, where the question of autonomy for Transcarpathia and the legal status of Rusyns as a distinct nationality remain unresolved. The delegates from Yugoslavia reported on the serious problems their community faces as a result of the war in their country.

Delegates and guests were also treated to several cultural performances. On the first night, the professional Aleksander Duchnovycz Theater from Prešov performed in Rusyn a revised version of Duchnovycz’s nineteenth-century play, “Virtue is More Precious than Riches” (Dobrodeteľ prevyšaet bohatstvo). On the second evening, the amateur Lemko theater from Legnica, Poland performed excerpts from Andrij Kopča’s new play written especially for the congress, “The Last Hour” (Poslednja hodyna), a moving tale about the forced deportations of Lemkos from their homeland in 1947. The congress ended with a spirited performance outdoors by PUL’S, the professional Rusyn folk ensemble from the Duchnovycz Theater in Prešov. Under a beautiful late afternoon sky, which drew hundreds of delegates and spa visitors, the Lemko poet Petro Trochanovskij concluded by thanking PUL’S for all they have done, most especially during the past two years, to promote the reputation of Rusyn folk culture throughout the Carpathian region and abroad.

The Second World Congress issued a resolution outlining its goals during the next two years as well as a statement of concerns regarding the present status of Rusyns worldwide. The full texts of these two documents will appear in the next issue of the Carpatho-Rusyn American. It was also decided that the Third World Congress of Rusyns will take place in Ruski Kerestur, Yugoslavia, in 1995, to coincide with the 250th anniversary of the Rusyn settlement of the Bačka/Vojvodina.

SINCE THE REVOLUTION OF 1989

Prešov, Slovakia. In December 1992, the first issue of a new periodical, Holos Karpat (Voice of the Carpathians), appeared in Prešov for the Rusyn population living in northeastern Slovakia. It is the official organ of the Aleksander Duchnovycz Society (Obščestvo/Tovarystvo im. O.V. Duchnovycz), the interwar cultural organization that was renewed in 1991 (see the Carpatho-Rusyn American, Vol. XV, No. 3, Autumn 1992, p. 9). The newspaper is edited by Dr. Mychajlo Ryčalka, who is also chairman of the society.

The first issue of Holos Karpat includes the text of the official statute of the Duchnovycz Society, whose goals include “bringing together members of the Rusyn, Ukrainian, and Russian nationalities,” in order “to develop the national identity of Rusyns in Slovakia and abroad” and “to stimulate appreciation for their native language.” The statute does not state what is the “native language” of Rusyns; moreover, the first and subsequent issues of Holos Karpat are published in literary Ukrainian. Those interested in obtaining this Ukrainian-language newspaper may write to: Společnost A. Duchnoviča, Hlavná 62, 080 01 Prešov, SLOVAKIA.

Bielanka, Poland. The Hospodar Rusyn Democratic Circle of Lemkos in Poland was established in the Lemko Region in 1991. Its specific goal is to lobby the Polish government in an effort to have property returned to Lemkos who were forcibly evacuated from their homes during the so-called “Vistula Action” in the spring of 1947. The Hospodar Rusyn Democratic Circle is headed by the Lemko activist, Pavlo Stefanovskij, who in January 1993 started a new Lemko Rusyn-language bulletin called Lemko. The first two issues of the bulletin contain primarily correspondence with the Polish government regarding property claims and with officials of the Ukrainian government regarding the question of national identity.

In a letter to Ukraine’s ambassador to Poland, dated March 27, 1993, Hospodar’s chairman Stefanovskij writes: “Following the political storms that have rocked Poland and Czechoslovakia, the return to Rusynism is a natural phenomenon, not some kind of political Rusynism or artificial separatism. The return to traditional Rusynism is the only natural means to save our region and its greatest cultural riches in all their purity.” Those interested in obtaining this Lemko-Rusyn language publication should write to: Redakcija Lemko, Bielanka 4, 38-311 Szymbark, POLAND.

THE CARPATHO-RUSYN AMERICAN

The Carpatho-Rusyn American (ISSN 0749-9213) is a quarterly publication of the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center Inc., a non-profit cultural organization whose purpose is to promote knowledge about all aspects of Carpatho-Rusyn culture through the publication and distribution of scholarly and educational material about the Carpatho-Rusyn heritage in Europe and America. General inquiries concerning the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, and all communications concerning this publication, should be directed to:

Carpatho-Rusyn American
132 Hawthorne Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15218
Phone: 412-371-3823

Patricia A. Krafck, Editor
Annual Subscription is $12.00