«Да всь єдино будуть!»
«Благодарим Господа»

На миру пам'ятку ювілейних святкувань 350-ліття Ужгородської Унії 1646 – 1996
For Rusyn Americans summertime provides an opportunity to make contact with our roots in travel to the homeland and also participation in Rusyn folk festivals in the United States. As a Lemko-Rusyn American, I appreciate this chance to rediscover my roots and my heritage—not through books, but on a soft breeze that carries a Lemko-Rusyn melody to me from an outdoor performance stage, or through coming face to face with the present-day residue of the beautiful 109-acre Lemko Park Resort, Located in Monroe, New York, the resort hosts both the Talerhof Day Memorial and the Lemko Day cultural festival.

Talerhof Day in early August is a somber event commemorating the loss of Lemko-Rusyn community leaders—largely Orthodox clergy, teachers, and intellectuals—in the infamous Austrian World War I era prison camp, Talerhof. Arrested and imprisoned for presumed pro-Russian sympathies at a time when the Austria-Hungary was at war with tsarist Russia, many did not survive the harsh camp conditions. Talerhof Day speaks of the suffering and survival of Lemko Rusyns as a small, vulnerable people trapped between larger forces. It is a vital, yet bittersweet component of the Lemko-Rusyn experience. The memorial service celebrated on that day is held at the Talerhof Memorial Chapel, which was built on the grounds of the Lemko Park and dedicated in 1964.

The basement of the Talerhof Memorial Chapel houses a small, but fascinating museum. It is filled with interesting artifacts and exhibits, including a list by province and village of Lemko Rusyns who perished in the prison camp. Also on display are folk embroideries, depictions of Lemko-Rusyn churches, monuments and historical sites in the homeland and in the United States, carved figures, crosses, pysanky, traditional wooden household items, and maps of Lemkovyna, the area of southeastern Poland historically inhabited by Lemko Rusyns until the 1947 Vistula Operation which forcibly deported hundreds of Rusyn families. This small gem of a museum is so packed with ethnic and cultural memorabilia that nearly every surface area is occupied, including the walls. For Lemko Rusyns seeking their roots, it is well worth the visit.

The Lemko Day cultural festival in late August is more in keeping with traditional summer fare. Before watching the formal stage program, festival participants may choose to stroll the grounds, eat homemade ethnic cuisine at Lemko Park’s restaurant, or swim in the large outdoor pool. The three-hour stage program is held against a lovely backdrop of pine, maple, and oak trees. The program is a real celebration of Slavic identity, offering a wide variety of Lemko-Rusyn, Ukrainian, Slovak, and Russian folk singers, dancers, and musicians. After the cultural program, festival participants enjoy a delicious barbecue and dance on the shady hilltop dance floor.

Festivals in the Lemko-Rusyn homeland are more geographically dispersed, as the Lemko Rusyns themselves were after their involuntary resettlement in 1947. Several events take place in the Carpathian homeland, to which some Lemko Rusyns have returned since 1956. Other events take place in the flat region of Silesia in western Poland, where most Lemkos were resettled during the Vistula Operation.

Among other events, the three largest are the Vatra at Zdynia, held in the Carpathian homeland in southeastern Poland in July, and the August Michalów Vatra of the Lemko Rusyns “in exile,” held in Silesia, as well as the Rusalja or Pentecost Festival in early summer in Zyndranowa. The vratas function both as ethnic town hall meetings and community picnics. They bring older Lemko Rusyns together to reminisce and grieve for a lost homeland and way of life. They also provide an occasion for young people to become acquainted with their heritage.

Like everything else that is Lemko Rusyn, however, the vratas have been caught up in the tug-of-war between the Rusyn and Ukrainian orientations. The Zdynia Vatra, originally a creation of Lemko Rusyns who wished to express their culture in an apolitical manner, has come under the influence of Lemko Ukrainians. It has become markedly more Ukrainian than authentically Lemko Rusyn in both form and content. Ukrainian national flags are displayed where once no political emblems of any kind were present, and strictly Ukrainian culture rather than Lemko-Rusyn culture is predominant in the stage performance. This controversy over identity, expressed here in “festival form,” is part and parcel of what it means to be Lemko Rusyn. No Lemko-Rusyn summer experience would be complete without firsthand exposure to these divisions and a witness to how they penetrate all aspects of Lemko community life.

The Michalów Vatra is smaller, but faithfully retains the indigenous culture and spirit of its founders. Authentic Lemko-Rusyn folkways predominate here. It is a significant sign of pan-Rusyn support that since the 1989 collapse of communism in Eastern Europe, revitalized Rusyn communities in neighboring countries now send their own folk ensembles to participate in the Michalów Vatra.

The Rusalja Festival is hosted by Fedir Gocz and his Museum of Lemko Culture (see A VILLAGE MUSEUM, C-RA, Vol. X, No. 2, 1987, pp. 4-8). Gocz himself is a living icon representing those who strive to preserve Rusyn culture. The Rusalja celebration is an excellent opportunity to enjoy authentic Lemko-Rusyn culture in an intimate atmosphere of small crowds. Contemporary Rusyn music is offered by youthful Lemko performers, and both Orthodox and Greek Catholic morning liturgies are held. The beautifully rendered open-air Lemko Cultural Museum is a treasure trove of authentic architecture, artifacts, and folk costumes that hearken back to a lifestyle and culture largely vanished since the deportation of Lemko Rusyns from southeastern Poland.

Again, for Rusyns in search of their Lemko-Rusyn roots or for non-Lemko Rusyns, a visit to the American festivals or to the vratas or Rusalja at the Gocz museum in Poland provides a summertime taste of the past and an encounter with the living reality of Rusyn life today.

Susyn Mihalasky
Associate Editor
METODYJ TROCHANOVS'KIJ (1885-1947)

Metodyj Trochanovskij was born on May 5, 1885 in the Lemko Region village of Bińczarowa (Rusyn: Bil'careva). After receiving his pedagogical education at the Teacher’s Seminary in Krosno, he taught at the elementary school in the Lemko village of Uhryń. In 1913, he married Konstan­cija Durkot, daughter of a prominent Lemko priest and civil activist, Father Ioann Chrysostom Durkot, and became involved in Lemko-Rusyn educational and social concerns. World War I put a stop to these activities, however. Together with dozens of Lemko leaders Trochanovskij was arrested, accused of treason against Austria-Hungary, and sentenced to death during the Second Vienna Trial of 1916. Fortunately, the execution was stayed, and he was in 1917 released from the Talerhof internment camp where he was sent.

The fall of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy gave Lemkos an opportunity to try to decide their own political fate. Trochanovskij found himself at the very heart of the movement for the establishment of the Rusyn National Republic of Lemkos and was a founding member of the Russka Rada (Rusyn Council) in Krynica. His support for Lemko teachers who refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the Polish state was well known to his own people and was even admired by some Poles. Although such political activity ultimately proved to be fruitless, the effort nevertheless helped to unify and galvanize the Lemko population.

In 1930, Trochanovskij and others organized in Krynica a festival called the Days of Rusyn Culture. Over two thousand Lemkos participated in a procession, which concluded with the raising and blessing of a memorial Talerhof Cross. During this same year, several political meetings also took place in Krynica. On these occasions Trochanovskij advised Lemkos to organize stores and credit unions in the region. He also underlined the danger of ukrainianization in the Lemko Region and advocated resistance against it. This matter was discussed at length at a meeting in Gorlice, where in October 1932 Lemko Region activists declared they should work to preserve and develop their own distinct Lemko culture and language. Trochanovskij advocated that this could be best achieved by introducing into Lemko schools a primer and readers written in the Lemko-Rusyn vernacular. Shortly thereafter, on December 8, 1933, the first ever Rusynophile oriented Lemko organization, the Lemko Sojuz (Lemko Association), was established in Sanok.

Trochanovskij became one of the most influential leaders in the Lemko Association. As part of his on-going cultural activity, he wrote the Lemkivskij bukvár (Lemko Primer) and Përša knyžćeka (First Reader), both of which would subsequently be introduced into Lemko Region schools. In order to provide the schools with professional teachers, Trochanovskij organized courses in the Lemko language at the Teacher’s Seminary in Stary Sącz. He also became editor-in-chief of the Lemko vernacular newspaper, Lemko (1934-1939). Before long, the Krynica-based Lemko Association started successfully lobbying in Warsaw for financial support for Lemko-Rusyn interests and also expanded its horizons by corresponding with the Lemko Association of the United States and Canada.

Despite the Lemko Association’s declared and proven loyalty to the Polish state, in 1936 a major shift in the Polish government’s attitude toward the organization took place. Government financial support for Lemko-Rusyn activities was systematically cut back. Ethnic Lemko teachers were systematically removed and replaced by ethnic Poles. Beginning in 1938, Trochanovskij’s primer was banned. These negative developments forced Trochanovskij and other Lemko leaders to lodge protests in Warsaw, where despite promises they were unable to attain an audience with the Polish Prime Minister. Finally, the outbreak of World War II in September 1939 interrupted the decade-long struggle for the free expression of a Lemko-Rusyn identity, and it marked the start of a decade of physical and cultural devastation throughout the Lemko Region which was incorporated into Nazi Germany’s Third Reich.

The Ukrainophiles, who had made considerable advances in the Lemko Region in the late 1930s, were able to promote further their cause during the Nazi occupation. Dozens of Ukrainian refugees from Soviet-controlled eastern Galicia settled in the Lemko Region after 1939 and worked to strengthen the Ukrainian national movement. Ukrainian activists provided lists of Russophile and Rusynophile Lemkos to the Nazis, who viewed them as a potential pro-Soviet fifth column in occupied Poland. Among those on the list was Trochanovskij, who was arrested on June 21, 1941 and imprisoned in Kielce until the last months of the war. When Soviet troops entered the Lemko Region in 1944, he was arrested again, this time by the NKVD during a general sweep of Poland’s intelligentsia. Upon his release, the entire Trochanovskij family was resettled to Wroclaw, where Metodyj died a few months later.

After Trochanovskij’s death, Lemkos were dispersed to the Soviet Ukraine and to the far western regions of Poland. They were subjected to national assimilation and paralyzed by fear and apathy during the worse years of Stalinist terror. Any manifestation of Rusyn identity were considered illegal and counter-revolutionary. Despite the tragic times when Trochanovskij died, the traditions which he upheld are since 1989 in the post-communist era once again being manifested openly and with pride.

Bogdan Horbal
New York, New York

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THE CARPATHO-RUSYNS (part 5)

This is the fifth and final part of a general introductory article on all aspects of Carpatho-Rusyn life which we began in the Summer 1995 issue of the Carpatho-Rusyn American (Vol. XVIII, No. 2). Considering the enormous changes that have taken place in the European homeland during the past few years, we feel it appropriate to provide our readers with new and updated information. —Editor

History (continued)

During the interwar years, Carpatho-Rusyns in Czechoslovakia lived for the most part in the province of Subcarpathian Rus' (Podkarpats'ka Rus'). They had their own governor, elected representatives in both houses of the national parliament in Prague, Rusyn-language schools, and they were considered one of the three "state peoples" of Czechoslovakia. They did not, however, receive the political autonomy they were promised in 1918-1919. Moreover, about 100,000 Carpatho-Rusyns in the Prešov Region were administratively separated from Subcarpathian Rus' and given only the status of a national minority within Slovakia. Despite such political problems compounded by existing difficult economic conditions made worse during world economic crisis of the 1930s, the Carpatho-Rusyns did enjoy an extensive national revival and marked improvement in their educational and cultural status during Czechoslovak rule. In particular, they learned how to live in a democratic society governed by the rule of law.

One result of the newly-found freedom was an increase in religious and national tensions. Left basically to themselves within a democratic Czechoslovakia, the Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches clashed with each other in competition for new adherents and for control of church property, while supporters of the Carpatho-Rusyn, Russian, and Ukrainian national orientations—each with its own organizations, schools, and publications—tried to convince the masses that they were either Rusyns, Russians, or Ukrainians.

In Poland, the Lemko Rusyns had no specific political status and no hopes for any kind of autonomy. Nevertheless, the Polish government did allow during the 1930s instruction in Lemko Rusyn in elementary schools and the establishment of civic and cultural organizations. Also, in 1934, the Greek Catholic church created a special administration for the Lemko Region that was no longer under the direct control of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic hierarchy.

On the eve of World War II, the status of Carpatho-Rusyns changed substantially. As a result of the Munich Pact of September 30, 1938, Czechoslovakia became a federal state. In early October, Subcarpathian Rus' finally received its own long-awaited autonomous government headed by Andrej Brodij (1895-1945). By November 1938, a second autonomous government headed by the local pro-Ukrainian leaders, Avhustyn Volosyn (1874-1945) and Julijan Revaj (1889-1978), changed the province's name to Carpatho-Ukraine. That same month, Hungary annexed the whole southern region of Carpatho-Ukraine including its main cities, Užhorod and Mukachevo. Then, on March 15, 1939, when Hitler destroyed what remained of Czechoslovakia, Carpatho-Ukraine declared its independence, but was immediately annexed by Hungary. For the rest of the war, Subcarpathian Rus' (Carpatho-Ukraine) remained under Hungarian rule, while Carpatho-Rusyns in the Prešov Region remained in what became an independent Slovak state closely allied to Nazi Germany.

Meanwhile, north of the mountains, the Lemko Rusyns found themselves under Nazi German rule after Poland was destroyed in September 1939 and the Lemko Region was annexed to Hitler's Third Reich. Finally, in the wake of the German-led invasion of Yugoslavia in the spring of 1941, the Vojvodina with its Carpatho-Rusyn inhabitants was annexed to Hungary. Thus, during World War II, Carpatho-Rusyn lands were ruled by either Nazi Germany or its allies, Hungary and Slovakia.

For most of the war years, the Carpatho-Rusyn homeland did not suffer any military damage and the economic situation was relatively good. This did not mean, however, that certain segments of the population were exempt from the suffering caused by the new political conditions. In 1939-1940, nearly 40,000 mostly young Carpatho-Rusyn males who were opposed to Hungary's annexation of Carpathian Rus' fled across the mountains into eastern Galicia, the former Polish region that after September 1939 was annexed to the Soviet Union. The young refugees, who expected to be welcomed to join in the fight against fascism, were instead arrested, accused of crossing into Soviet territory illegally, and sent to concentration camps. Three years later, those who survived were allowed to join the new Czechoslovak Army Corps set up to fight alongside the Soviet Army against Hitler.

Msgr. Avhustyn Volosyn, the leading Carpatho-Rusyn grammarian and pedagogue and later head of the Ukrainian orientation in interwar Subcarpathian Rus'.
At home in Subcarpathian Rus’, which was renamed Carpathia (Karpatalja) by the Hungarians, Carpatho-Rusyns had a modicum of cultural freedom. The “Uhror-Rusyn” language was taught in schools, and Rusyn publications and cultural societies were permitted as long as they were pro-Hungarian. Expressions of pro-Ukrainian sentiment were forbidden, however. The war years were particularly harsh toward the over 100,000 Jews, who alone made up nearly one-quarter of the population in Subcarpathian Rus’. In the spring of 1944, the Hungarian authorities under pressure from Germany deported virtually all of Subcarpathia’s Jewish inhabitants to the Nazi death camps where they perished. As a result, the Jewish presence, which for several centuries had been an integral part of the Carpatho-Rusyn environment, ceased to exist.

In the fall of 1944, the German army, together with its Hungarian and Slovak allies, was driven from all parts of Carpathian Rus’ by the Soviet Army. Among the victorious Soviet forces was the Czechoslovak Corps with its large contingent of Rusyn soldiers. During the course of the war, the Allied Powers (United States, Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union) had agreed that Subcarpathian Rus’ should again be part of a restored Czechoslovak state. In October 1944, however, the Soviet Generalissimo Stalin suddenly changed his mind. With the help of local Communists, the Soviets prepared the ground for the annexation of Subcarpathian Rus’ to what was described as the “Soviet Ukrainian motherland.” No general plebiscite was ever held, and in June 1945 a provisional Czechoslovak parliament (with no Carpatho-Rusyn representation) ceded Subcarpathian Rus’ to the Soviet Union. As for other Carpatho-Rusyn territory, the Prešov Region remained within Czechoslovakia; the Lemko Region became part of a restored Poland; and the Vojvodina became part of the Serbian Republic within a federated Yugoslavia.

Within a few years after the end of World War II, all Carpatho-Rusyns found themselves under Communist rule, either in the Soviet Union or in countries under Soviet domination. The last of these countries to become Communist was Czechoslovakia. That took place in 1948, the same year Yugoslavia freed itself from the Soviet bloc, although it still remained Communist.

Communist rule had a particularly negative impact on traditional Carpatho-Rusyn life. During the first few years after World War II, the Greek Catholic church was outlawed; land was taken from the individual farmers who were obliged, often against their will, to work in collective or cooperative farms; and the Rusyn nationality was forbidden. Anyone who might claim his or her identity as Rusyn was against their will listed in official documents as a Ukrainian. The Rusyn language was banned in schools and all publications.

An even worse fate befell the nearly 180,000 Lemko Rusyns living in Poland. About two-thirds were encouraged to emigrate voluntarily to the Soviet Union in 1945 and 1946. Then, in the spring of 1947, those Lemkos who had remained in the Carpathians were driven from their homes by Polish security troops. They were forced to live in the former German lands of western and northern postwar Poland (in particular Silesia). As for the Lemko Region itself, many age-old Rusyn villages were destroyed, while others were taken over by Polish settlers.

Father Jevmenij Sabov, an important cultural activist of Russophile orientation in interwar Subcarpathian Rus’.

The only exception to the sad fate of Carpatho-Rusyns during the post-World War II Communist era was Yugoslavia. In the Vojvodina and neighboring Srem region, Rusyns were recognized as a distinct nationality with their own government-supported schools, publications, cultural organizations, radio, and television programs. The Greek Catholic church also was allowed to function in Yugoslavia. Finally, in 1974, when the Vojvodina became an autonomous province within the republic of Serbia, the Rusyns became one of the five official nationalities in the region.

Despite the harshness of Communist rule, the Carpatho-Rusyns did from time to time protest their fate. In Poland during the late 1950s, Lemkos began to return illegally to their native mountain villages, and by the 1980s about 10,000 did succeed in reestablishing new homesteads or in buying back their old houses. Some Lemkos also tried to set up their own cultural organizations and publications distinct from Ukrainians, but they were blocked in those efforts by the Polish government.

In neighboring Slovakia, Carpatho-Rusyns protested their reclassification as Ukrainians by identifying themselves as Slovaks and sending their children to Slovak schools. The result was large-scale assimilation among Carpatho-Rusyns in the Prešov Region whose numbers declined by two-thirds after a policy of forced Ukrainianization was implemented in 1952. During the Prague Spring of 1968,
when Czechoslovakia's leaders tried to “humanize” Communism, Carpatho-Rusyns in the Prešov Region demanded the return of their nationality as well as the re-establishment of Rusyn schools and publications. Those efforts were cut short, however, by the invasion of the country by the Soviet Union and its allies on August 21, 1968. Within a year of the invasion, the hard-line pro-Soviet Czechoslovak Communist authorities once again banned all activity that might in any way be connected with a distinct Carpatho-Rusyn identity. Only the Greek Catholic church, which was restored in Czechoslovakia in June 1968, was allowed to survive, although it rapidly dropped its former Carpatho-Rusyn orientation and became an instrument of Slovakization. Thus, the four decades of Communist rule following World War II brought to an end many aspects of traditional Carpatho-Rusyn life and led to the virtual disappearance of the group as a distinct nationality.

Carpatho-Rusyns, like every other people in central and eastern Europe, were profoundly influenced by the reforms that began in the Soviet Union after the accession to power in 1985 of Mikhail Gorbachev as head of the Soviet Communist party. The first changes actually took place among the Lemko Rusyns in Poland, who as early as 1983 organized an annual folk and cultural festival (Vatra). The goal of the Vatra was to restore among Lemkos the idea that they belonged to a distinct nationality that was neither Ukrainian or Polish, but Carpatho-Rusyn.

A Carpatho-Rusyn national revival really got underway only after the fall of Communism in 1989. During the next two years, a new organization to promote the idea of a distinct Carpatho-Rusyn nationality was established in each of the countries where Rusyns live: the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns in Ukraine, the Rusyn Renaissance Society in Slovakia, and the Lemko Association in Poland. This same period saw as well the establishment of new organizations among Rusyns outside the Carpathian homeland, such as the Society of Friends of Subcarpathian Rus’ in the Czech Republic, the Ruska Matka in Yugoslavia, and even the Organization of Rusyns in Hungary where it was thought Rusyns had long ago disappeared through assimilation already by the end of the nineteenth century. Also, for the first time since World War II, Rusyn-language newspapers and magazines began to appear, including Rusyn and Narodný noviny in Slovakia, Podkarpats‘ka Rus‘ in Ukraine, and Besida in Poland.

The greater ease of travel following the fall of Communism allowed Carpatho-Rusyns new opportunities for cross-country cooperation. As a result, in March 1991, the first World Congress of Rusyns and, in November 1992, the first Congress of the Rusyn Language were held, both in Slovakia. The cultural and organizational activities that have taken place since the Revolution of 1989 have in varying degrees been assisted by the governments of all the countries where Rusyns live, except Ukraine. In March 1991, Rusyns were even recognized and recorded as a distinct nationality in the census of the former Czech and Slovak Federated Republic.

In the wake of the Revolution of 1989, the vast majority of Carpatho-Rusyns in Europe found themselves living in new countries. In the summer of 1991, the Rusyns of Yugoslavia became divided by a new state boundary between a smaller Yugoslavia (that still included the Vojvodina) and a newly independent Croatia. Unfortunately, the Carpatho-Rusyns of Croatia (about 2,500 in the area near Vukovar) were in the war zone between Croatia and Serbia and suffered much material losses and forced deportation as part of Serbia’s policy of ethnic cleansing. At the end of 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed, the Carpatho-Rusyns in Transcarpathia voted overwhelmingly in favor of an independent Ukraine. Finally, in January 1993, the Czechoslovak state broke up, so that the Prešov Region Rusyns now live in an independent Slovakia.

Today, the governments of Slovakia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Yugoslavia recognize Carpatho-Rusyns as a national minority. Rusyn organizations in each country are concerned primarily with preserving the group’s existence as a distinct nationality through cultural activity, such as publications and the work of scholarly institutions, schools, and theaters. In Ukraine’s Transcarpathia, however, the emphasis has been on political activity, in particular efforts to obtain autonomy.

In December 1991, at the same time that the citizens of Ukraine voted in a referendum for their independence, 78 percent of the inhabitants of Transcarpathia voted in favor of autonomy (self-rule) for their province. To date, neither the Ukrainian government nor parliament has implemented the promised autonomy voted on by over three-fourths of the population in a legal vote. In an attempt to put pressure on Ukraine to fulfill the results of the December 1991 referendum, a “Provisional government of the Republic of Subcarpathian Rus’” was formed in Uzhhorod in May 1993, headed by Professor Ivan Turjanycja. In June 1994, Turjanycja was also elected a deputy to the regional parliament (Narodna Rada), and it seems that the struggle to achieve autonomy for Subcarpathian Rus’ (Transcarpathia) in Ukraine will henceforth be carried out within the framework of the regional parliament.

The Carpatho-Rusyn revival that began in the 1980s has not been greeted with universal favor. Those individuals in each country who accept a Ukrainian self-identity and who head pro-Ukrainian organizations reject all efforts by Carpatho-Rusyns to assert their national identity. Local Ukrainian leaders state categorically that “there cannot and should not” be a distinct Carpatho-Rusyn nationality. This is because the pro-Ukrainians believe that all Rusyns are simply a regional variant or “branch” of the Ukrainian nationality. Such views are particularly widespread in Ukraine, the only country that refuses to recognize Carpatho-Rusyns as a distinct people.

Despite such denials as expressed by the Ukrainian government and by nationalistic elements within the Ukrainian population, the idea of a distinct Carpatho-Rusyn nationality and culture continues to be greeted favorably, both in neighboring countries where the group lives as a minority (Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia) as well as by several non-governmental organizations based in other countries who are concerned with fate of minority cultures and languages in Europe.

Paul Robert Magocsi
Toronto, Ontario
THE WORLD CONGRESS OF RUSYNs:
AN INTERVIEW WITH THE CHAIRMAN

March 1996 marked the fifth anniversary since the First World Congress of Rusyns was held in Medzilaborce, Slovakia. On that occasion the founding chairman of the World Congress, Vasyf Turok, was interviewed by Dr. Anna Plíškova, associate editor of the Rusyn-language newspaper, Narodný noviny. The full interview first appeared in the magazine Rusyn, IV, 1-2 (Presov, 1996), pp. 2-3.—Editor

PLÍŠKOVÁ: There is no question that the World Congress of Rusyns has made concrete steps toward achieving recognition for Rusyns as a distinct nationality, especially in Europe, but also in the United States and elsewhere throughout the world. How do you as chairman of the executive council of the World Congress assess the organization after five years of activity? In other words, what has been its development from one congress to the next?

TUROK: Those people who thought the World Congress of Rusyns would be some kind of political party were surprised. In fact, from the First to the Third Congress we have only wished that Rusyns, wherever they live, become aware that they form a compact entity about which they for a long time have been unaware, that they have a sense of unity, that we are aware of what each other is doing regardless in what country we live, and that we cooperate in common ventures. To be sure, it has not been possible to undertake any major activity, because as an organization we have not had and still do not have our own financial resources. In other words, from the beginning we have been without any funds.

It is only individual organizations who are members of the World Congress that have funds. Thanks to them it has been possible for members of the executive council to meet twice each year to plan for cultural events and to organize every two years a meeting of the entire World Congress of Rusyns. Last year the Third Congress took place in Ruski Kerestur in Yugoslavia.

Each congress has had a specific character. The First World Congress of Rusyns in Medzilaborce, Slovakia was a very emotional event. This is completely understandable, since it was in part a result of the fact that until then Rusyns [in various countries] did not really know about each other. Suddenly they had the possibility to meet for the first time in free circumstances.

At the time [1991], for instance, we did not even know that in Hungary Rusyns still existed as a relatively compact group in certain places (Komloska, Mucsony) and they maintained a sense of Rusyn national identity to such a degree that between the First and Third Congresses they created their own organization. It is headed by Gabor Hattinger. This Rusyn Organization in Hungary has been able to obtain funds from the Hungarian government and to organize cultural events in Komloska, Mucsony, and Budapest. It has brought together Rusyn ensembles at folk festivals and it has published books and newspapers in Rusyn, prepared television programs, and most recently has arranged for Rusyn to be taught in schools. And this has occurred in Hungary of all places!

Here I must say that from the very beginning of our work—and still now—the Rusyns of Hungary have turned out to be for us and for Europe the greatest surprise. No less a surprise during this fifth anniversary year of the World Congress is a further change in the Hungarian government's attitude toward its Rusyns that has taken on today a very positive character.

We are also very pleased that the improvement in the situation of Hungary's Rusyns between the First and Third Congresses has to a degree been matched by the Rusyns of Poland. Also, with the end of the war in Yugoslavia, the republic of Serbia has returned to the level of support that it had given to its Rusyn nationality before the conflict. Unfortunately, developments in Subcarpathian Rus' [in Ukraine] have not evolved at all, and we are especially unhappy with the present situation in Slovakia.

Hence, if one were to assess the national revival of Rusyns at home [in Slovakia] and abroad from the First to the Third Congress, I would have to say that with regard to support from the Slovak state and the resultant possibility for the dynamic development of Rusyn culture, we reached the end of a four-cycle [1990-1994] and that since then for a whole year [1995] we have stagnated. This, moreover, is not a good sign for the Rusyn movement, because it was precisely the Rusyns of Slovakia who had become the integrating force for all Rusyns in Europe. Nevertheless, I believe that by the time of the Fourth Congress in Budapest in 1997 the situation will change not only in Slovakia but also in Subcarpathian Rus'. This is essential, because if in these two regions nothing will change for the better among Rusyns, then everyone will begin to feel that the Rusyn revival is only a temporary phenomenon.

We have, however, been able to observe recently that even Kiev has slowly begun to alter its attitudes to the Rusyns in Ukraine. It certainly would be a good thing if by the time of the Fourth Congress the ice in Ukraine really melted so that the congress as a whole could concern itself fully with practical issues in the areas of education, the media, cultural activity, and language. I would also hope that the policy of the Slovak government toward its national minorities, including Rusyns, will finally become stable and clear and that the government will avoid the chaotic and confrontational tone that has dominated its policy [since Vladimir Mečiar came to power in 1995].

PLÍŠKOVÁ: Looking at the five-year work of the World Congress as a whole, what do you consider its general achievements and what plans exist so that the executive council of the World Congress of Rusyns will be able to attain a degree of prestige not only among Rusyns but among society at large? And how can the work of the World Council attain a higher professional level?

TUROK: I consider as the mark of success those things I already mentioned. Namely, that Rusyns in various countries are in continual contact with each other, that they have positively influenced each other, and that the outside world has become aware of Rusyns in general and their organizations who are members of the World Congress of Rusyns. A very positive role in this regard is played by the magazine

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may I remind you that one cannot speak of such issues related to Rusyns. As a result, Poland's support for its country's cultural and civic representatives to discuss issues related to Rusyns. We should also not forget that the First World Congress of Rusyns [1991] has had such an impact that the Polish government and parliament formally condemned the 1947 Vistula Action which deported Lemkos far from their homeland and that Poland has begun to undertake reparations for losses suffered by Lemkos.

Finally, the Third World Congress, at which we once again called upon all Rusyns to remain loyal to the states in which they live, made such a favorable impression on war-torn Yugoslavia and on the government of Serbia that the position of Rusyns in that country was strengthened. As an indication of the good relations that the government of Serbia maintains toward Rusyns, Prime Minister Mirko Marjanović acted as patron of the Third World Congress.

With regard to the second part of your question—the professional level of our activity and future perspectives—may I remind you that one cannot speak of such issues without touching on the problem of the financial resources of the World Congress. Since no state where Rusyns live provides funding for the work of international organizations, we are turning our attention to the Council of Europe. I believe it is only in this manner that the plans of the World Congress of Rusyns can be realized. Among these—and one that I consider very important—is a series of visits to the governments of each state where Rusyns live in order to inform them directly of the entire Rusyn problem and of our goals. If the Council of Europe supports this plan, then obviously we would inform it of the results of our visits. Should such visits be realized, I believe it would provide a great boost to the Rusyn national revival and cultural life in Europe, and that it would place the World Congress of Rusyns in a very positive light throughout the world.

**OUR FRONT COVER**

Memorial card issued by the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo on the occasion of the 350th anniversary of the Union of Užhorod. The first line in Church Slavonic script reads: “May All be United. Thanks Be to God.” The symbol in the middle includes images of the castle of Užhorod (where the union was reached) and St. Peter’s Basilica at the Vatican.

**UPDATE ON THE RUSYN LANGUAGE**

Teaching the Rusyn language in schools has been a high priority of Rusyn cultural organizations since the Revolution of 1989 and the fall of Communism. The situation of Rusyns in Slovakia has shown the most promise, although as we have discussed in recent issues of the *Carpatho-Rusyn American* (Vol. XVIII, Nos. 3 and 4, 1995) the present Slovak government has been slow in implementing its commitment to provide Rusyn-language instruction in elementary schools.

The situation finally began to change in March 1996, when Slovakia’s Ministry of Education distributed a questionnaire to parents inquiring whether they wished that “the Rusyn language and literature be taught as a subject to three hours weekly.” Within a month, 569 parents responded positively, and in early June a meeting of school inspectors in eastern Slovakia together with Ministry of Education officials announced that there are ten schools where a minimum of 6 to 8 pupils per class will be enrolled in Rusyn-languages classes.

A special preparatory seminar for teachers will be conducted in August by Dr. Vasil’ Jabur, the author of Slovakia’s new Rusyn grammar and an employee of the Ministry of Education who formulated the program in Rusyn language and literature. Beginning in September 1996, the ten elementary schools in which Rusyn will be taught in grades 1 through 4 are in the Humenné district (Medzilaborce—2, Snina, Zboj), the Svidník district (Havaj, Ladomirová, Svidník), the Stará Lúbovňa district (Čiřec, Šarišské Jastrabie), and the Vranov district (Rus’ká Poruba).

Now that the Ministry of Education has a clear idea of its needs, it also plans to release for public distribution the various textbooks and dictionaries that have since early 1995 been held in storage. Some individuals who have heeded the suggestions made in the *Carpatho-Rusyn American* to write to Slovakia’s Minister of Education have received the books directly from Bratislava.

Rusyn-language instruction in ten schools in eastern Slovakia is only a beginning. Other parents need to be encouraged to request more Rusyn classes, and the Ministry of Education needs to prepare a program for upper-level classes and, most importantly, establish a university Department (*Katedra*) of Rusyn Language and Culture in order to train teachers properly and prepare pedagogical and scholarly materials in a professional manner.

In Poland, the Rusyn language began to be taught in elementary schools as early as September 1991. Since that time the number of schools offering classes has been between 6 and 8 per year, with the number of students in each school fluctuating between 4 to 15. New textbooks of the Lemko-Rusyn language have been prepared for the first four elementary classes by Myroslova Chomjak.

In Hungary, the first Rusyn-language course to be taught in a school in that country since World War I was inaugurated in September 1995. The course is offered in the village of Macsóny just northwest of Miskolc in the eastern part of the country. At the outset there were no textbooks, but in January 1996 a representative of Hungary’s Ministry
of Education purchased from the Slovak government several copies of the Rusyn Bukvar (Primer) and Čítanka (Reader) by Jan Hryb that were prepared for Rusyns in Slovakia but were not yet being used in that country. The Organization of Rusyns in Hungary is pressing for Rusyn to be taught in other elementary schools, most particularly in Komlóska.

The best situation for Rusyn-language instruction remains Yugoslavia, where in the Vojvodina region it has been taught in several schools since 1945. The most important of these is Ruski Kerestur which has its own elementary school, gymnasium (high school), and teacher’s college where all courses are taught in Vojvodinan Rusyn. Despite the recent war, the international embargo, and the sometimes extremist anti-minority statements by Serbian nationalists, the Yugoslav government continues its full support for the Rusyn school system.

One year has passed since the formal declaration of the codification of the Rusyn language in Slovakia. Since that time the world of Slavic scholarship has looked with great favor on the Rusyn language revival.

Already twelve journals have carried articles about what is described as a “new Slavic language for a distinct Slavic people.” Positive reports about the January 1995 Rusyn language codification in Slovakia have appeared in journals published in Austria (Europa Ethnica, Österreichische Osthefte), France (Revue des études slaves), Germany (Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas, International Journal of the Sociology of Language), Great Britain (Slavonica, Slavonic and East European Review), Slovakia (Slavica Slovaca), and the United States (ASN Analysis of Current Events, Austrian Studies Newsletter, East European Politics and Societies, Slovak Studies Association Newsletter).

One of the world’s most distinguished Slavists, Professor Nikita I. Tolstoj of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, has also commented on the Rusyn language in Slovakia. According to Academician Tolstoj: “the idea for such a literary language is not a fantasy or the imaginary creation of a few isolated individuals or groups. Rather, it clearly shows the natural desire of people to have a language that is widely functional and usable in all walks of life.”

Tolstoj’s remarks are part of an introduction he wrote for a book entitled, A New Slavic Language is Born: The Rusyn Literary Language of Slovakia, which contains the scholarly papers delivered at the codification event by Professors Aleksander Duličenko, Paul Robert Magocsi, and Vasyl’ Jabur. This new book (in a bilingual Slovak and English edition) will be available from the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center in May 1996.

ACADEMICIAN TOLSTOJ ABOUT THE RUSYN LANGUAGE

Codification of the Prešov Region variant of the Rusyn language, officially announced in January 1995 in Bratislava, Slovakia, was greeted by the international Rusyn community and national minority organizations throughout Europe (see A NEW SLAVIC LANGUAGE IS BORN, C-RA, Vol. XVIII, No. 1, 1995, pp. 4-8). At the present time, attempts are being made to codify the Lemko variant of Rusyn. Initial work has focused on the creation of children’s school texts, anthologies, and dictionaries. Such projects strengthen and standardize the building blocks of a language—its grammar, vocabulary, spelling—and serve to spread the knowledge of and acceptance of the codification efforts among the general population in whose hands the fate of a language ultimately resides.

In early 1995, the Lemko-Rusyn poet Petro Trochanovskij published an anthology of poetry for children, Manko, kup mi knižku (Mom, Buy Me A Book). The anthology, including poetry from all Carpatho-Rusyn regions of Europe, was published by the Lemko Association (Stovaryšjna Lemkiv) with funds from the Polish Ministry of Culture and Art.

Myroslava Chomjak, a Lemko language teacher and author of several children’s grammar texts and readers, likewise has had the second part of her colorfully-illustrated 70-page children’s primer, Včyme i bavime sja (Let’s Learn and Play), published by the Lemko Association. Chomjak is also currently at work on an interregional dictionary of the Rusyn language, which provides all the dialectical variants of words in a given Carpatho-Rusyn region and then contrasts them with the dialectical variants of the same word from other Carpatho-Rusyn regions. Chomjak expects to have a completed first draft of the dictionary ready for peer review at the Fourth World Congress of Rusyns, to be held in Budapest, Hungary in May 1997.

CODIFICATION OF THE LEMKO VARIANT OF RUSYN

It is only in Ukraine, where the vast majority of Rusyns live, that there is no instruction in any school in the Rusyn language. A new grammar of the Subcarpathian variant of the Rusyn language was recently completed by Ihor Kerča and Stepan Popovyč (Materyn’ skyj jazyk: pysennycja pro puldarpats’kyh Rusyniv, 1995).

There is little likelihood, however, that the Rusyn language will be taught anywhere in Transcarpathia in the near future, because local pro-Ukrainian activists together with government officials and advisors in Kiev continue to argue that Rusyn is not a language and that demands for teaching and publishing in that the so-called “non-existent language” are part of an international conspiracy to undermine the Ukrainian state and nationality.

Paul Robert Magocsi
Toronto, Ontario
SINCE THE REVOLUTION OF 1989

Kiev, Ukraine. On March 4-6, 1996 a delegation of Slovak parliamentary deputies led by Dušan Slobodník, chairman of the parliamentary committee on foreign affairs, participated in a three-day meeting with the government and parliament of Ukraine. The question of the expansion of NATO eastward was the main item on the original agenda, but it turned out that the Ukrainian side was concerned primarily with discussing the “problem of Rusyns and Ukrainians,” which according to a March 5 Radio Free Europe report “has created tension in the relations between the two states.” Upon the return of the parliamentary delegation to Bratislava, several Slovak newspapers interviewed the participants and reported that “the Slovak deputies were surprised at how alive the question of the Rusyn national minority is in Kiev’s official circles.” (Pravda, March 8, 1996).

The delegation’s leader, Dušan Slobodník, summed up the present official view of Slovakia: “With regard to Rusynism, I can say with complete confidence as former Minister of Culture that our government never wished to divide the unified structure of Ukrainians in Slovakia and to support Rusynism. Nevertheless, our constitution does not deny anyone the right to belong to the nationality of his/her choice. In the 1991 census, 17,000 persons responded that they are of Rusyn nationality. [Nearly 50,000 also responded that their native language was Rusyn—editor]. This development was to a certain degree the result of propagandistic activity on the part of the Rusyn movement but not the Slovak government.” (Nove zytta, March 15, 1996, p. 1).

Ladomirová, Slovakia. “The Rusyns, a small central European people with a thousand-year-old history, have experienced a harsh historic fate similar to the Tibetans, Kurds, and Palestinians.” These words are the clarion call of a public statement known as the Charta Ruthenium 2000 (The Rusyn Charter for the Year 2000), issued on March 20, 1996 by Michal Kost, the mayor of the village of Ladomirová and a Rusyn activist in the Svidnik district of eastern Slovakia.

The Rusyn Charter 2000 laments the fact that during the first four years after the Revolution of 1989 the Rusyns were treated well in Slovakia, but that since 1995, under Prime Minister Mečiar, “the words and deeds of the state’s administration are diametrically opposed. Slovakia’s signature and ratification of international agreements for the protection of national minorities and the reality that we face today are an example of the cynical, even arrogant attitude of government officials.” In order to correct this situation, “the goal of the Rusyn Charter 2000 is to form a political party based on the ethnic principle, that is one whose goal is to elect parliament candidates of Rusyn background who will defend the economic, social, and ecological interests and needs of Rusyns in Slovakia.” The Rusyn Charter 2000 has provoked widespread interest in Rusyn circles in Slovakia and calls upon Rusyns worldwide to assist it in achieving its political goals.

Budapest, Hungary. On March 21, 1996, Hungary’s Foundation for National and Ethnic Minorities allotted 3.5 million forints ($44,000) from state funds as part of the 1996 budget for Rusynský život (Rusyn Life), the official organ of the organization of Rusyns in Hungary. As a result of such funding, Rusynský život, which has been published irregularly since 1994, now appears as a bi-weekly small format newspaper in the Rusyn and Hungarian languages, edited by Judita Kišsova and under the direction of Gabor Hattinger. Subscriptions are available by writing to: Rusynský život, ORRUMA, Nagymező u. 49. fsz. 4, 1065 Budapest, Hungary.

Prague, Czech Republic. In March 1996, a Greek Catholic Exarchate was created for the Czech Republic. Greek Catholics in that country (which includes the historic lands of Bohemia, Moravia, and southern Silesia) had previously been under the jurisdiction of the Eparchy of Prešov, now in independent Slovakia. The new Exarchate of Prague is headed by Bishop Ivan Ljaviniec, a native of Subcarpathian Rus’ who since World War II has lived in what was former western Czechoslovakia. The main church of the exarchate is St. Clement’s in the heart of Prague near the Charles Bridge. The exarchate publishes irregularly a bulletin in Czech and in Ukrainian, Jedýným srdcem, available from the Biskupský exarchat, Haštalské nám. 4, Praha, Czech Republic.

Užhorod, Ukraine. On April 21, 1996, an estimated five to eight thousand people came to Užhorod to celebrate the 350th anniversary of the Union of Užhorod. The Greek Catholic faithful and well-wishers came from the Transcarpathian region and other parts of Ukraine, from neighboring Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, the Czech Republic, and Yugoslavia, as well as a delegation of 200 people from the United States.

It was on April 24, 1646, that 63 Orthodox priests from the Subcarpathian region professed their allegiance to the pope in Rome. This move resulted in the creation of the Uniate church, which in the 1770s was renamed the Greek Catholic church and which later, in the United States, came to be known as the Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic church.

The massive celebration was led by hierarchs and priests of all the Greek/Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic eparchies that trace their origins (in terms of territory or ancestral heritage) to the Eparchy of Mukačevo. This includes the eparchies of Prešov in Slovakia; Hajdúdorog in Hungary; Kríževci in Croatia (and former Yugoslavia); Prague in the Czech Republic; Pittsburgh, Passaic, Parma, and Van Nuys in the United States; and Toronto in Canada. Among the officiating visitors were the papal nuncio to Ukraine (Archbishop Antonio Franco), the secretary of the Vatican’s Congregation for Oriental Churches (Archbishop Myroslav Marusyn), and several bishops from the Ukrainian/Greek Catholic Archeparchy of L’viv. Although the Eparchy of Mukačevo is presently within the borders of Ukraine, it is not part of the Archeparchy of L’viv, but retains a special status (ecclesia sui juris) directly under the jurisdiction of the Vatican. This situation has been criticized on several occasions during the past few years by Ukrainian/Greek Catholic church leaders and by Ukrainian nationalists in Ukraine and abroad.

Pope John Paul II has nevertheless defended the distinct jurisdictional status of the Eparchy of Mukačevo, and in preparation for the 350th anniversary celebrations he published an open letter to Bishop Ivan Šemedij of Mukačevo,
celebrating the Union of Užhorod separate from the celebrations later this year by the Archeparchy of L'viv, which will mark the 400th anniversary of the Union of Brest that formed what is today called the Ukrainian (Greek) Catholic church. Hence, the success of the 350th anniversary celebrations in Užhorod was a further confirmation of the distinctiveness of the Carpatho-Rusyn people and their Eastern-rite Christian traditions.

The closing homily at the commemorative Divine Liturgy was delivered in English (with a translation into Rusyn) by the Archbishop of Pittsburgh, Judson Procyk. In keeping with the spirit of the pope’s greetings read during the celebration, Archbishop Procyk stressed the ecumenical role of the Greek (Byzantine Ruthenian) Catholic church. In the measured tones of a realist, he summed up the historic place of his church in the ecumenical process: “We may not be the bridge that was intended, but we may be the beam to show the way.”

Following the Divine Liturgy, the visiting hierarchs and priests visited the new Greek Catholic Seminary in Užhorod, funded largely by the Byzantine Ruthenian faithful in the United States. The impressive, well-built, and excellently maintained seminary is still under construction, although the living and dining quarters, classrooms, and beautiful chapel have already been completed and are in use.

The celebratory day ended with an evening concert of religious and folk music at the Transcarpathian Regional Theater. Among the performers were the Choir of the Greek Catholic Cathedral in Užhorod, the Choir of Greek Catholic Seminary of the Eparchy of Prešov, the chamber ensemble of the Transcarpathian Philharmonic Orchestra, and the Transcarpathian Folk Ensemble.

A Forum on Carpatho-Rusyn Heritage

THE CARPATHO-RUSYN AMERICAN

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General inquiries concerning the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, and all communications concerning this publication, should be directed to:

Carpatho-Rusyn American
P.O. Box 192
Fairfax, VA 22030-0192
Phone: 703-691-8585
Fax: 703-691-0513

Patricia A. Krafick, Editor
Jack Figel, Business Manager

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The new Greek Catholic Seminary in Užhorod. The wing on the right where the chapel is located has been completed since the time of this photograph.

RECENT EVENTS

Užhorod, Ukraine. On April 22, 1996, an international scholarly conference entitled “The Union of Užhorod of 1646 and the Historical Fate of the Eparchy of Mukachevo,” was held in Užhorod under the sponsorship of the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo. The opening session was chaired by Bishop Ivan Semedij, and in the presence of Vatican officials and other hierarchs the following papers were read: “The Theological and Non-Theological Motivations Behind the Union Movement in Užhorod and Transylvania,” by Professor Ernst Süttna (Vienna, Austria); “From Brest to Užhorod,” by Dr. Atanasij Pekar (Rome, Italy); “Assimilation or Adaptation: The Genius of the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo,” by Professor Paul Robert Magocsi (Toronto, Canada); and “The Union of Užhorod and the Slovaks,” by Dr. L’udovít Haraksim (Bratislava, Slovakia).

Other speakers included Dr. István Pirigyi (Debrecen, Hungary); Dr. Vasyl’ Nimčuk (Kiev, Ukraine); Dr. Oleh Turij (L’viv, Ukraine); Professor Jurij Sak (Užhorod, Ukraine); Father Ivan Tydir (Užhorod, Ukraine); Sandor Foldvari (Debrecen, Hungary); Father Danijil Bendas (Vynohradovo, Ukraine); Dr. Jurij Kossej (Užhorod, Ukraine).

Budapest, Hungary. On May 14, 1996, in the presence of representatives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Hungary’s Office of National and Ethnic Minorities, its Ministry of Culture and Education, and the Organization of Rusyns in Hungary, a new Rusyn Scholarly Institute in Hungary (Naukovyj institut Rusyniv u MadjarSKU) was created. The new body is headed by Dr. Tibor M. Popović, a native of Subcarpathian Rus’. Dr. Popović is a specialist in geography who for several decades has been a professor at the Technical University in Budapest. The new Rusyn Scholarly Institute in Hungary has four sections: language, headed by Professor István Udvari; social sciences, headed by Dr. Tibor Popović; traditional architecture, headed by Mychal Tomčanij; and music and art, headed by Sandor Bart.

The first goal of the institute is to prepare the program for the Fourth World Congress of Rusyns (to be held in Budapest in the spring of 1997). Among its specific projects are a bibliography of Rusyn studies, a Rusyn historical atlas, planning for a tourist center in Komlóska (a Rusyn village in northeastern Hungary), and the codification of the Rusyn language in Hungary.