Rusyn Parent: "We want our children to study our language in school."
Slovak Official: "Don’t worry, I can guarantee that your children will study in our language"—that is, in Slovak.
PROMISES, PROMISES!
CHAOES OR DECEPTION IN SLOVAKIA?

Toward the end of August, I was part of a delegation from several of Europe’s national minorities that met with two officials at Slovakia’s Ministry of Culture in Bratislava. Both officials were courteous but also rather insistent to convince our visiting delegation that present-day Slovakia has an excellent record with regard to its national minorities. In the course of the discussion that focused on the status of Magyars (Hungarians) and Rusyns in Slovakia, one of the ministry officials proclaimed that his new state treated national minorities “better than any other country,” and that “the world should thank Slovakia for being such a model of tolerance.”

Two days later, our delegation was in Prešov for an international conference on Europe’s national minorities. Aside from discussing the present and future of Europe’s stateless peoples, we all had an opportunity to learn first hand about Slovakia’s supposedly exemplary policy toward at least one of its national minorities, the Rusyns. It quickly became clear that there was a large gap between the verbal claims of the government official in Bratislava and the reality, so to speak, on the ground.

We learned that in the course of 1996, the formerly vibrant publishing house of the Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusyn’ska Obroda) had become virtually devastated. Just a few years ago, government support for the only Rusyn-language publisher in the country amounted to 2 million crowns in 1993, and 1.9 million crowns in 1994. Under the new government of Vladimír Mečiar, however, the subsidy was initially cut more than half to 970,000 crowns in 1995 and then to a mere 380,000 crowns in 1996. The result? No salaries for the five-member staff of the publishing house, who for over a year have been working as unpaid volunteers and who as of September 1996 are no longer eligible for unemployment benefits. Rusyn books cannot be published; the magazine Rusyn is unable to appear; and the weekly newspaper Narodný noviny, which was reduced to appearing only every second week since January 1996, appears now at best only once a month.

There did seem to be one bright spot, however. The Rusyn language, which was codified in January 1995, was in September of that year to be taught in about 8 to 10 schools. This did not happen because the language had not yet gotten formal approval from Slovakia’s Ministry of Education. Therefore, in the course of the 1995/1996 school year, the appropriate study plans were drawn up; a questionnaire was submitted to parents, nearly 600 of whom requested their children be taught in Rusyn; and the ministry approved a week-long training seminar in late August to prepare teachers slated to teach in Rusyn beginning in September 1996.

Suddenly, two days before the seminar was to begin, and as teachers were on their way to Prešov to attend the training program, the Ministry of Education cancelled the seminar, stating that the ministry had not yet approved Rusyn-language instruction at one of its formal monthly hearings (gremidlna porada). Rusyn cultural activists in Slovakia, many of whom were in Prešov for the national minority conference, were devastated by the news that once again government promises were broken and that Rusyn would not be taught in schools.

Then, in a strange twist that seemingly only bureaucrats can explain, on August 28, the Ministry of Education’s monthly hearing officially approved the program to teach Rusyn. Of course, the August 28 decision came after the teacher’s training seminar was abruptly cancelled and, therefore, much too late for a school year that was about to begin in a few days time.

Are these the acts of a serious government? Is the problem perhaps the result of the general disorder that has accompanied the establishment of all new countries in the region? And has the disorder been compounded by the fact that Slovakia, which has been independent only since January 1993, does not yet have a sufficient number of trained and experienced non-Communist bureaucrats and governmental officials? Or, on the other hand, are these acts part of a deliberate policy to deceive the Rusyn population and to reverse the achievements made in the course of the Rusyn national revival since 1989? And why would the Slovak government want to do this? Perhaps it is pressure from neighboring Ukraine, frequently initiated by local pro-Ukrainians within Slovakia, that causes the Slovak government to have second thoughts about supporting Rusyn cultural distinctiveness for fear of alienating their powerful neighbor to the east?

Whatever the real reason may be, Rusyns in Slovakia and observers abroad are tired of speculating about the motivations of governmental circles in Slovakia. Rusyns simply want the minimal cultural rights that they deserve not as some kind of gift from the government, but as a right due to them as loyal tax-paying citizens of Slovakia.

Unfortunately, the cultural achievements of Slovakia’s Rusyns since 1989 have been slowed down because of the drastic decline in financial support by the Slovak government after 1995. And while it is true that grants to the cultural programs of all minorities have been reduced, the Rusyns had less to begin with and so have even less now. In contrast to other national minorities in Slovakia, such as the Magyars, Roma (Gypsies), Ukrainians, and Germans, the Rusyns do not have their own schools (nor Rusyn classes in Slovak-language schools), they do not have their own radio station, and they do not have their own university department (katedra) to train teachers and to promote scholarship about their history and culture. Even what they did have for a few years—a flourishing publishing house—has been financially crippled. On the positive side, Rusyn individuals and businesses owned by Rusyns have begun to contribute money to their struggling newspaper and publishing house, although their relatively generous donations (exceptional for a former Communist environment) are insufficient to allow this one aspect of Rusyn cultural activity to survive.

Rusyns have always been loyal to Slovakia. They do not deserve the treatment they are receiving from the present government of Slovakia. Regardless whether the cause is bureaucratic chaos or calculated deception, unbroken promises are unbroken promises. The Ministry of Culture official who wanted the world to recognize Slovakia will probably get his wish. The recognition, however, will not be for tolerance, but rather for intolerance toward one of its national minorities—the Rusyns.

Paul Robert Magocsí
Toronto, Ontario
VOLODYMYR FEDYNYSNEC’

Ever since the outbreak of the French Revolution in 1789, the idea of nationalism became a mass phenomenon and spread to many other lands during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Its success has in large part depended on the patriotic enthusiasm of individual native sons and daughters. This was particularly the case during the early phase of the phenomenon, known as the national revival, when poets, historians, linguists, and folklorists began to collect, publish, and promote the cultural heritage of their respective peoples.

Such heritage-gathering work also had another purpose, for almost without exception national activists needed to convince the larger society as well as their own people of the value of the culture they were attempting to preserve. For instance, as surprising as it may seem, the leaders of the German national revival in the early nineteenth century initially worked hard to convince fellow Germans that the German language, literature, and culture were at least as “good” as the French.

The Rusyn national revival has followed the pattern of other national revivals in Europe. The present revival began more or less during the revolutionary year of 1989 in all countries where Carpatho-Rusyns live: Ukraine, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia. Each of those countries has its own Rusyn cultural and patriotic enthusiasts, and in Ukraine among the first and still most active is Volodymyr Fedynysynec’.

Volodymyr Fedynysynec’ was born in 1943 in the Carpatho-Rusyn village of Repynne, in northcentral Subcarpathian Rus’, present-day Transcarpathia in Ukraine. Both his parents were small-scale peasant farmers. Although Subcarpathian Rus’ was annexed to Hungary at the time of his birth, the young Volodymyr was educated and spent most of his adult life under the new Soviet regime that was established in his homeland in 1945. Soviet rule brought with it positive and negative features. Among the positive aspects was an educational system open to many more young people than was ever before possible in Subcarpathian Rus’.

After completing his elementary education in Repynne, Fedynysynec’ attended the pedagogical institute in Mukacevo (1961), then graduated from Uzhhorod State University (1966), where he specialized in Ukrainian language and literature. While at the university he was particularly enamoured with the dialects of Subcarpathian Rus’ and studied with the leading postwar specialist on the subject, Professor Josyp Dzendzelivs’kyj. His other love was Rusyn ethnography, an interest he was able to pursue systematically as a senior researcher at the outdoor museum (skansen) of Transcarpathian Traditional Life and Architecture in Uzhhorod, where he worked during the 1980s.

It was as a writer, however, that Fedynysynec’ was to become best known. Poetry, short stories, tales for children, translations, journalistic essays, original studies in literature, folklore, and history were the many genres he used to express his ideas and emotions. From his first collection of poetry in 1967 until the mid-1980s, he published nearly a dozen original literary works and became a member of the Writers Union of the Soviet Union (1983).

Then came the Gorbachev era and the enormous changes throughout the Soviet Union. Until that time and for nearly four decades since World War II, Fedynysynec’ experienced the negative aspects of Soviet rule, growing up in the totalitarian Communist environment of Soviet Transcarpathia in which the identity and traditional culture of his Rusyn people were suppressed. The new Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, called on all citizens to criticize openly the past and provide constructive ideas to improve the future. Fedynysynec’ welcomed wholeheartedly the new political reality and felt the time had finally come to reassert publicly his Rusyn identity.

In 1991, he published three seminal essays, “I am a Rusyn, My Son is a Rusyn”; “Our Peaceful Rusyn Way”; and “Be a Rusyn So That Rusyns Will Survive,” which served as a clarion call to himself and others to return to their Rusyn roots. Although Fedynysynec’ continued to write in Ukrainian, he argued that Rusyns were not a branch of Ukrainians and that they should have their own literary language as the best means to express their unique culture. For nearly a year, he expressed these views as founding editor of Podkarpat’ska Rus’ (1992), the newspaper of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, and then in numerous newspaper articles, and radio and television interviews whether in Ukraine or in neighboring Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. His pen seemed to know no bounds, so that between 1989 and 1996 alone he published over twenty works in which Rusyn themes predominated, including literary or critical studies of the nineteenth-century national awakeners Aleksander Duchnovyc’ (1994), the twentieth-century social bandit Il’ko Lypei (1993), and the contemporary scholarly activist Paul Robert Magoci (1995).

Not surprisingly, the Rusyn message propagated by Fedynysynec’ is not welcome among many people, most especially those in his native Subcarpathian Rus’ (Transcarpathia) who consider themselves Ukrainian. Nor is the present economic crisis in post-Communist Ukraine conducive to individuals whose profession is literature, the arts, or scholarship. But Volodymyr Fedynysynec’ prevails, because as a patriotic enthusiast he is driven by the belief that Carpatho-Rusyns are a distinct people with the rich heritage that is worthy to be shared now with all other peoples, and to be passed on to future generations.

Philip Michaels

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DISCRIMINATION AGAINST RUSYNS?
NEW RESPONSES

The first response is from the Vice-Chairman of the Government of Slovakia, Jozef Kalman, to the INQUIRY regarding national discrimination against Rusyns in Slovakia which was sent to several Slovak ministries, newspapers in Bratislava, and to other officials in the fall of 1995 and which was published in the Carpatho-Rusyn American, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, 1995. (See other responses published in the C-RA, Vol. XVII, No. 4, 1995.) This is followed by two presentations delivered in August 1996 at the second congress of La Maison des Pays, an international organization for promoting the cultures of national minorities in Europe.

Dr. Vasyl’ Jabur, former head of the defunct Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture, is presently head of the Ministry of Education’s office for instruction in minority languages in Presov. Professor Myron Sysak is chairman of the Department of Russian Language and Literature at Safarik University in Prešov. —Editor

From the Vice-Chairman of the Government of the Slovak Republic:

We have received your letter on behalf of six civic and religious associations of American Carpatho-Rusyns with an appeal to the Slovak government concerning the alleged ethnic discrimination of Rusyns in Slovakia.

We would like to assure you that the minority policy of the Slovak government is just and unprejudiced toward all citizens and members of ethnic minorities. The government annually allocates substantial financial resources for the support and development of minority cultures which is not a common practice even in developed democracies.

As for Rusyns in the Slovak Republic, there is no discrimination at all against them. The Constitution of the Slovak Republic guarantees their right to freely proclaim their ethnicity, to develop their own distinct culture, to disseminate and receive information, to educate their children in their mother tongue, and to assemble within their ethnic associations.

As you know, the process of ethnic self-realization is a complex one, and just as in America, there is no single term here for Rusyns. In Slovakia, the Rusyns who in practice consider themselves a single ethnic group use their own terms such as Rusyn, Rusyn-Ukrainian, Ukrainian, Carpatho-Russian, and Carpatho-Rusyn. Eventually, a common term for this ethnic group will be accepted, or perhaps the use of several terms will continue.

A similar situation exists in the use of the mother tongue as a means of instruction in schools. According to the most recent census, 50,000 people claimed Rusyn as their mother tongue, but of these 20,000 claimed Slovak nationality, 17,000 Rusyn nationality, and 14,000 Ukrainian nationality. Which language they choose for education depends on their own free choice.

Our investigation of your statement regarding the interest on behalf of ten schools to instruct pupils in the Rusyn language revealed that this interest did not come from the children’s parents. Rather, the schools and teachers were picked by regional clubs of the Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusyn’ska Obroda). After the basic pedagogical documents are prepared, the Ministry of Education will examine the request for instruction in the Rusyn language through directors of school districts and elementary schools. This task also involves the use of textbooks and teaching materials published by the Ministry of Education. The distribution of only one publication, Rusyns in Slovakia, by Paul R. Magocsi, was forbidden, based on an evaluation done by Slovak historians.

As to your further allegation that the government abolished the Institute of Rusyn Language, we would like to point out that it could not be abolished because there were no documents concerning the institute’s foundation issued by either the Ministry of Culture or the Ministry of Education. After requesting documents from the Rusyn Renaissance Society, we learned that it was not a question of the establishment of an institute, but rather the name given to cultural activity dating back to 1993 for which government financial aid was allocated. In 1994, this group chose a new name, the Research Institute for Regional Culture, not the Institute for Rusyn Language and Literature.

Transformation of a non-existent institute into a Department of Rusyn Language and Culture at the Pedagogical Faculty of Safarik University in Prešov is not possible either theoretically or practically. Issues relating to the establishment of scholarly, pedagogical, economic, and informational departments or centers is, according to Paragraph 10 of the Universities Act No. 172/1990, solely in the hands of academic institutions and faculties which are independent of the government. Only academic experts can resolve such issues.

The request made to establish an independent Rusyn broadcasting desk within the broadcasting structure of ethnic and minority programming of the Slovak Radio in Prešov is based on the fact that 41.4% of its programs are in Ukrainian and 52-60% in Rusyn. The introduction of an independent broadcasting desk is possible after the completion of the proper legislative procedures.

On the issue of financial aid for the Rusyn Renaissance Society, we would like to state that in 1995 all ethnic minorities received financing proportionate to the capacity of the state budget. Moreover, the Rusyn Renaissance Society used 470,000 crowns in unauthorized activities which the Ministry of Culture subsequently accepted in an effort to resolve the bad financial situation of the association.

With regard to your allegation that a governmental decree issued in 1952 proclaimed all Rusyns as Ukrainians and then banned the Rusyn nationality and language, we wish to inform you that the 1930 population census conducted in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus’ recognized only two nationalities—Russian and Malo-Russian (Ukrainian). There was no mention of Rusyn nationality. The term Rusyn was accepted by Constitutional Act No. 144/68 concerning the situation of nationalities in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. In its list of nationalities living in Czechoslovakia, it included “Ukrainian (Rusyn).” Both terms were used simultaneously. Obviously, this indicates that even the pre-
The Role of the Mother Tongue in the Preservation and Cultivation of a National Identity: The Case of the Rusyns of Eastern Slovakia

I should like to begin by paraphrasing a statement by the well-known Czech writer and thinker, Jan Neruda, which goes something like this: A people which has lost or does not have its own language loses its voice in the body of humanity and is fated to play only a “silent role” on the world scene, that is, the role of a servant. And he who wants to be only a servant separates himself from the ranks of his own people.

Questions of ethnicity and language are closely linked, even interdependent, and this is something which becomes especially apparent in times of national revival, or re-revival. Ethnocultural revivals always evolve directly from a literary language, and they cannot develop without the propagation of the language, that is, without the formation of the literary language as an integral component and living medium of national culture. During the national awakening of all the Slavic peoples, the creation or codification of a literary language has been at the center. As Aleksandr Dulicenko has pointed out, a literary language is also the major factor in the case of micro-ethnic Slavic groups. The relatively large number of such groups attest to the fact that national consciousness is weakened or absent wherever a language is lacking. This means that it is no longer possible to anticipate the re-Slavicizing of former Slavs who have completely lost their Slavic mother tongue.

Hence, national revivals are possible only when spoken languages are still alive and when there are attempts to create a literary language on the basis of a local dialect or dialects.

With regard to the Rusyn mother tongue in Slovakia, I believe that the leadership of the Rusyn Renaissance Society [Rusyn’ska Obroda] understood correctly and just in the nick of time the threat facing the Rusyn language. The society also understood the need to link the revival of Rusyns in Slovakia and in other regions with the need to codify the literary Rusyn language, and it did everything possible so that intensive work on the codification could begin. The beginnings of this work extend back to November 1992, a project which Dr. Paul R. Magocsi discusses in detail in many scholarly articles.

Preparation for the codification of Rusyn moved quickly in the newly-established Institute of Rusyn Language, which in the short period of its existence—if I may boast a bit—accomplished a great deal. We were also prepared to work by some threatening conditions imposed on us by the authorities, conditions which could be summed up in the following way: Because you do not have a codified literary language, you may not have a Rusyn-language radio broadcast; you may not open a department of Rusyn language and prepare future teachers; you may not publish school textbooks or begin instruction of Rusyn in the schools; you may not prepare teachers for elementary school; and much else.

No one in the relevant government ministries took into consideration that the codification should be prepared on a solid scholarly level. No one supported the proposal to create and maintain a genuine scholarly institution where even the minimal conditions could be provided for such work. In spite of all this the institute managed to function on financial support from the Rusyn Renaissance Society and assiduously prepared basic codification texts.

And then the festive moment arrived. On January 27, 1995 the ceremony announcing the codification of the Rusyn literary language in Slovakia was held in Bratislava. Once again, thanks to Dr. Magocsi the academic world was informed not only through scholarly journals, but also by means of an impressive publication which appeared in a bilingual English-Slovak edition under the title A New Slavic Language is Born. I myself am proud of the fact that the introduction to this publication was written by one of the most well-known Slavists today, Russian Academician Nikita Il’ič Tolstoj, from whom I quote: “The book convincingly reveals that the idea for [a Rusyn] 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 that is not limited to a written and inert form, but which one that is widely functional and usable in all walks of life.”

Unfortunately, the euphoria of the codification’s ceremonial announcement was soon replaced by a harsh bitterness. The Rusyn Renaissance Society was severely punished for financially supporting the codification, and the Institute of Rusyn Language was liquidated and could not continue further work on normative texts. In spite of the fact that we have a codified literary language, none of the conditions mentioned above were subsequently fulfilled.

In order that the Rusyn language in Slovakia not disappear, we are placing a great deal of hope in its instruction in those elementary schools where parents show an interest. Here, it is essential to consider certain facts. In the 1991 census, 17,000 citizens of the Slovak Republic identified themselves as Rusyns and almost 50,000 stated that they consider Rusyns their mother tongue. In reality, the numbers in each category are actually much larger. As for concrete interest in the Rusyn language, a recent questionnaire solicited 563 parents from four regions who responded positively. The survey was conducted by Slovakia’s Ministry of Education.

In Slovakia at the present time there is no language study for pupils in their Rusyn mother tongue. This is because Rusyn schools were forbidden after 1953, and not through any fault of their own. The majority of Rusyns eventually chose Slovak schools. Clearly, a return to the situation before 1953 is neither realistic nor practically possible. That is why we propose to accept all decisions by
parents who wish to send their children to schools where instruction is in Slovak for a given number of hours, and where the Rusyn language and literature instruction for their children could be offered for the same number of hours. The basic conditions for the realization of this step were fulfilled with the codification of the Rusyn language in January 1995 and with the publication of normative language handbooks, a primer, and a reader as the basic textbooks for mastering the Rusyn alphabet and shaping initial skills and habits of reading and writing in Rusyn.

How do we envision the future of the Rusyn language and culture? The Rusyn language will have a special place in Slovak schools because after several decades it will again be possible for children of Rusyn citizens in Slovakia to study their mother tongue in school. This will contribute not only to the preservation and development of national identity, particularly that of a minority culture, it will also allow for the preservation and development of the ancestral language. The education of a literate Rusyn-speaking individual in academic surroundings will gradually enable a broadening of the functions of the Rusyn language and the eventual expansion of the Rusyn-speaking environment in various spheres of social life.

All this will inspire a natural yearning to return to a situation in which use of the Rusyn mother tongue in ordinary, namely family, life would again become the norm. A longing to return to Rusyn family traditions will contribute to the revival of traditional Rusyn national culture, to the gradual enhancement of the Rusyn literary language, and to the creation of models for intelligent, cultural communication in an increasingly refined normative literary language. This will surely put an end to the gradual disappearance of the basic source for the literary language, in other words, the natural, living Rusyn dialects—the pure, noble, untainted living speech. Without the full-fledged living oral form of a language, literary language cannot develop. If the living, spoken language dies out, then neither the language nor the people have any future. It is precisely the revival of the teaching of Rusyn in schools which could prevent the disappearance of this irreplaceable cultural treasure.

Even though all preparations had been completed to begin instruction in Rusyn this academic year in elementary grades one and two, we learned just yesterday from Ministry of Education officials that our work again was for naught. As a result of magyarizing forces, almost all Rusyns registered as Slovaks, although we are not Slovaks. While Slovaks remained did not consider themselves Ukrainians, because according to him Rusyns and Ukrainians are the same also insist that Rusyn automatically means Ukrainian—vel’ko-ukrajinci. I came to this conclusion after a television appearance by the Ukrainian ambassador to Slovakia, Dmytro Pavlyčko, in the spring of 1996. He was not concerned that an entire ethnic group had disappeared from a region. It only annoyed him that the few Rusyns who still remained did not consider themselves Ukrainians, because according to him Rusyns and Ukrainians are after all the same thing.

But we are not the same, Mr. Ambassador. If Ukrainians and Rusyns were the same, if Rusyn meant the same thing as Ukrainian, and Ukrainian the same thing as Rusyn, then what hinders Ukrainians from considering themselves only as Rusyns, from registering themselves only as Rusyns, from promoting only Rusyn language and culture? The catch is that those who insist that Rusyns and Ukrainians are the same also insist that Rusyn automatically means Ukrainian, but not vice versa.

As for the hybrid term Rusyn-Ukrainian, it is an anachronism just like Serbo-Croat, Czecho-Slovak, or Anglo-American. Ordinary people have mastered this simplistic arithmetic much better than Rusyn-Ukrainian demagogues and theoreticians. At the first free census [in 1991], people registered either as Ukrainians or Rusyns, but not one as a Rusyn-Ukrainian. And this was true even of the "Rusyn-Ukrainian" activists.

The forced ukrainization and Orthodoxization of our people had yet another result: An equal number of individuals who formerly considered themselves Rusyns and Greek Catholics now call themselves Ukrainians and Orthodox. Thank God! Let everyone be what they want to be. But let

We are an ethnic group which, "by decree," was stripped of our national identity. According to a decision of perpetually unnamed Soviet organs after 1944, Subcarpathian Rus’ was renamed Transcarpathian Ukraine, and Rusyns, who had lived there for centuries, were redesignated as Ukrainians. This decision directly affected us in Slovakia as well. They took from us not only our nationality, but also our Greek Catholic church—something which was inextricably linked to the Rusyn nationality. For forty years we were denationalized and spiritually reoriented. They tried to convince us that we were just a "small branch" of the great Ukrainian nationality which was largely Orthodox Christian. They told us that by becoming Ukrainians and Orthodox we would fulfill our historical destiny.

The results of such governmental policies were disastrous. Out of approximately 200,000 people who recognized themselves as Rusyn in 1946, we dwindled down to a handful of a few thousand. Forced ukrainization has meant for us an almost complete denationalization and has hastened the slovakization of our people and the latinization of our church. As at the outset of the twentieth century, the situation seemed to be repeating itself. At that time, as a result of magyarizing forces, almost all Rusyns registered themselves as Hungarians, although obviously none of us were Hungarians. Today, most of our villages are registered as Slovak, although we are not Slovaks. While Slovaks accept this situation silently, it is not any credit to them, just as it was not any credit to the Hungarians at an earlier time.

Nor does it seem that this situation particularly disturbs ukrainizers and today’s so-called Greater Ukrainians (vel’ko-ukrajinci). Today, most of our villages are registered as Slovak, although we are not Slovaks. While Slovaks accept this situation silently, it is not any credit to them, just as it was not any credit to the Hungarians at an earlier time.

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The forced ukrainization and Orthodoxization of our people had yet another result: An equal number of individuals who formerly considered themselves Rusyns and Greek Catholics now call themselves Ukrainians and Orthodox. Thank God! Let everyone be what they want to be. But let

About the Need to Preserve the Rusyn Language and Culture

I would like to take this opportunity at the Second Congress of the European Federation of National Minorities to bring both national and international attention to the difficult situation in which the Rusyns of eastern Slovakia find themselves.

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Vasyl' Jabur
Kojishe, Slovakia
August 23, 1996

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no one hinder another from being what he or she wants. We Rusyns have had enough bad experiences with intolerance.

Several representatives of the present government in Slovakia continue supporting the goals of the former Communist regime’s nationality policy. Even though a more numerous group of citizens now consider themselves Rusyn (17,000) rather than Ukrainian (13,000), and even though nearly 50,000 people identify Rusyn as their mother tongue, subsidies for the Rusyn press and for cultural activities are disproportionately lower in comparison to subsidies for Ukrainian activity. And this is not the only problem. In response to a Rusyn demand to initiate radio broadcasting in the Rusyn language, the director of the state-run Slovak Radio, Mr. Tužinsky, sidestepped constitutional law on the national identity of Rusyns when he wrote the following: “in order to organize broadcasting in the language of a particular minority or ethnic group, it is necessary that the group be acknowledged by law, and this is a decision of the National Parliament of the Slovak Republic. In the case of the Rusyn nationality, such a decision is still being awaited.”

How are we supposed to explain this? Once again, does someone think they have the right to permit us to be this, and not that? Or is this a demonstration of nationalistic displeasure? “What is this? Are Rusyns still here? There should have been an end to them a long time ago!”

One of Plato’s heroes self-assuredly answered to the reproach that an individual such as he meant nothing amidst the masses of millions: “Without me, the people are incomplete!”

I appeal to us all to do everything possible to preserve the language and culture of such an insignificant minority as the Rusyns of eastern Slovakia, because without us the people are incomplete.

Myron Sysak
Prešov, Slovakia
August 23, 1996

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**FORTHCOMING EVENT**

On May 30-June 1, 1997, the Fourth World Congress of Rusyns will be held in Budapest, Hungary. The congress is being hosted by the Organization of Rusyns in Hungary, headed by Gabriel Hattinger, and is being made possible by the generous support of the government of Hungary through its program of assistance to cultural organizations.

Aside from the Budapest-based Organization of Rusyns in Hungary, the Fourth Congress will consist of ten-member delegations from each organization that makes up the World Congress: the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, United States; the Lemko Association (Stovaryšňa Lemkiv), Poland; the Rusyn Cultural Foundation (Ruska Matka), Yugoslavia; the Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusyn’ska Obroda), Slovakia; and the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns (Občestvo Karpatskych Rusynov), Ukraine.

The Fourth World Congress of Rusyns will be held in the elegant Hungarian Culture Foundation (Kulturinnov) just opposite the Mátys Coronation Church on the central square atop the hill in old Buda. The Hungarian National Széchényi Library is planning an exhibit of Rusyn books and Hungary’s National Gallery an exhibit of Rusyn art to coincide with the Rusyn World Congress. Aside from the delegations representing each of the founding organizations, guests and observers are also welcome. Contact the Rusyn organization in your country for further information.

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**OUR FRONT COVER**

Cartoon by Fedor Vico from the Rusyn newspaper in Slovakia, Narodný noviny (Prešov), April 3, 1996.
NATIONAL MINORITIES IN UKRAINE
INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE RIGHTS

On June 28, 1996, nearly five years after it became an independent state, Ukraine adopted a new constitution. It is in Ukraine where the largest number of Carpatho-Rusyns live, an estimated 600,000 to 800,000 in the Transcarpathian oblast (historic Subcarpathian Rus'). Despite a referendum held on December 1, 1991, in which 78 percent of the inhabitants of Transcarpathia voted for autonomy, the region was not granted autonomous status nor is any provision made for Transcarpathian autonomy in Ukraine’s new constitution. The following is a commentary on the situation by Professor Ivan Turjanyecz, deputy of the Transcarpathian regional parliament (Oblastna Rada) and premier of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Subcarpathian Rus’.—Editor

The Declaration of State Sovereignty of Ukraine was ratified on July 16, 1990, when Ukraine was still a part of the Soviet Union. This document declared that Ukraine guaranteed rights for the free national development of all nationalities living on its territory, and that it recognized the priority of common standards of international law above the standards of its own internal laws. Ukraine also ratified a law, “On National Minorities,” but in fact it has remained, like many other laws concerned with human rights, declarative in nature and does not function in practice. The recently ratified Constitution of Ukraine also enumerates several general political and economic rights which were mentioned in the previous Constitution but which were never put into practice. This is why one must not expect that the present Constitution of Ukraine will guarantee these rights for its citizens, including its national minorities. The following analysis confirms this view.

Article 133 of the constitution proclaims that the Autonomous Republic of Crimea is a part of Ukraine and that it has its own constitution, parliament, and cabinet. This implies that Ukraine is a federative state. Nevertheless, Ukraine does not intend to recognize the historical record and to provide the status of autonomy to Subcarpathian Rus’, which had become a part of Ukraine as an autonomous republic according to the illegal Fierlinger-Molotov treaty [signed June 29, 1945 between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union]. Six months later, on January 1, 1946, the Subcarpathian autonomous republic was liquidated unlawfully.

In Subcarpathian Rus’, which is now called the Transcarpathian oblast (region), a plebiscite took place on December 1, 1991, and 78 per cent of the adult population in a secret ballot called for a return to the status of autonomy for their homeland. But this decision, adopted in accordance with the old and new constitutions and with the law “on referendums,” remains unrecognized by the governing authorities in Ukraine. The Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, the Association of Indigenous Peoples, the League of the Nationalities of Transcarpathia, and other political parties have many times during the past five years appealed to the president and the parliament of Ukraine regarding this problem, but each time their requests, protests, and declarations have been ignored. And this despite the fact that according to Ukraine’s old constitution and Article 40 of its new constitution the government is obliged to consider all appeals from citizens and to provide well-founded responses.

The Carpatho-Rusyns had an independent newspaper, Podkarpat’ska Rus’, which informed the citizens of their land about historical and political events that it was forbidden to discuss during the Stalin regime. In this newspaper, open appeals and declarations to the president and the parliament of Ukraine were published. At the instruction of the highest governing authorities of Ukraine, the Office of the State Prosecutor instructed the court to close the newspaper. But the Uzhhorod city and Transcarpathian regional courts did not find legal grounds to implement such a request. Despite legislation and article 34 of the Constitution of Ukraine, which proclaims the right to promote information freely for everyone, a presidential executive order directed the country’s Supreme Court to repeal the previous decisions of the Uzhhorod and Transcarpathian Regional courts and it unlawfully closed the newspaper Podkarpat’ska Rus’. In such circumstances, how can one speak of freedom of speech?

Article 11 of Ukraine’s new Constitution declares that the state assists in the consolidation and development of the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic character of all indigenous peoples. It is for this reason that in our land the Association of Indigenous Peoples was organized. But the state bodies unlawfully refuse to register that organization, and they discriminate against a doctor of science and professor of Uzhhorod State University only because he is the head of the association. How, therefore, can one speak of rights for the indigenous peoples of Ukraine?

Article 55 of the new Constitution of Ukraine states that each person has the right to appeal any decision of governmental bodies, and that to defend his or her rights the person may turn to an authorized representative who is concerned with human rights in the Parliament of Ukraine. But in our land nobody knows the name, address, or telephone number of this authorized representative. So far, not one of our entreaties addressed to the parliament has been answered. According to the law “on national minorities,” Rusyns have the right to be Rusyns. Officially, however, they are still considered Ukrainians. Leonid Kravchuk, the former president of Ukraine, forbade the use of the term “Rusyn nationality” in official documents. And although all power structures admit such a decision is unlawful, they nonetheless continue to apply this restriction.

There is only one reason for such lawlessness. If Ukraine were to recognize Rusyns as a nationality, an autonomous Subcarpathian Rus’ would be reborn. And if that were to happen, it might “run” from Ukraine to Europe?

Article 132 of the new Constitution proclaims that Ukraine will adopt the principle of decentralization and respect the historical, geographic, demographic, and other particular features of regions and their ethnic and cultural traditions. But in fact such legal guarantees are ignored, so that all attempts for Rusyns to have their own newspaper, to return to their nationality, to study their language in schools, to know their history and literature, and to develop their culture and keep their traditions are unable to be realized.

Without the support of Europe, present-day neo-Bolshevik Ukraine will never voluntarily and independently stop genocide against Subcarpathian Rusyns, which was started by Stalin in 1946 and still is going on.

Ivan Turjanyecz, Chairman
Society of Carpatho-Rusyns
October 1996
RECENT EVENTS

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. On April 26, 1996, the Senator John Heinz Regional History Center opened in Pittsburgh. The center, a magnificent nine-story structure, contains a core display which allows patrons to "walk through and experience" the history of western Pennsylvania. The immigrant experience portion of this display includes a Carpatho-Rusyn Greek Catholic funeral in a home in Homestead, Pennsylvania in 1910, complete with authentic Rusyn icons, customs, and even a recording of a funeral service sung in traditional Carpathian plainchant. Rusyn items donated by members of the Rusyn community are featured throughout other areas of the museum as well. The Rusyn display was coordinated by the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center and the Carpatho-Rusyn Society. The Regional History Center is the second museum in Pittsburgh which features the Carpatho-Rusyns and their experience in America as part of its permanent display, the other being the Andy Warhol Museum.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. During Memorial Day weekend, May 30-31, 1996, more than 80,000 people attended the Annual Pittsburgh Folk Festival, highlighting the various ethnic groups which make up the city. The three-day festival, held at the David Lawrence Convention Center, featured 24 ethnic groups, among them the Carpatho-Rusyns, who were capably represented by the Slavjane Rusyn Folk Ensemble and the Carpatho-Rusyn Society. The Slavjane Ensemble performed authentic Carpatho-Rusyn material to an enthusiastic crowd which waits every year to see the Carpatho-Rusyns perform. The group also sponsored a booth, patterned after a Carpathian wooden church, featured traditional Rusyn foods, and was a focal point for the entire festival.

The cultural display was organized by the Carpatho-Rusyn Society and featured Rusyn Christmas Eve traditions from the village of Jakubjany (former Spiš county) in present-day Slovakia. The table was complete with authentic Rusyn Christmas Eve foods, and the costumes of the angel and Guba of the Jaslickari were featured, along with authentically festive Rusyn traditional dress from Jakubjany. The Society also sponsored the Carpatho-Rusyn booth in the marketplace section of the festival, selling Rusyn tee-shirts, mugs, audiotapes, Christmas ornaments, books, and a host of other Rusyn items.

A new addition this year was a hall of costumes. The Carpatho-Rusyn Society displayed authentic traditional dress brought from Europe—a woman’s outfit from the village of Chyža in the former Ugočsa county, and a man’s outfit from the village of Ōlšavica in former Spiš county.

Cleveland, Ohio. On September 8, 1996, the city of Cleveland, in honoring its 200th anniversary, held a "One World Day" celebration in the Cleveland Cultural Gardens which various ethnic groups had renovated in preparation for this event. The Rusin Cultural Gardens, founded in 1937, were restored through the efforts of the Cleveland branch of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society, led by John Krenisky of Cleveland and Florence Orris of Broadview Heights, Ohio. The Society on that day staffed informational displays in its garden about Rusyns and Rusyn culture and sold Rusyn ethnic items and books. Members of the Cleveland branch created a banner for display in the garden that day. Prešov Rusyn singer Beata Begeniova and accompanist Michal Salak performed Rusyn folksongs on the main stage, and young members of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society in Rusyn traditional dress from Zemplín, Už, and Marmaros counties carried the Rusyn banner in the parade concluding the event. A number of Society members attended from Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Michigan.

Cottbus, Germany. On September 25-28, 1996, the local Sorbian Institute organized an international scholarly conference on the subject, Modernization of the Vocabulary of Europe's Regional and Minority Languages. Dr. Jurij Pan’ko of Sáťárk University in Prešov, author of the recently published Rusyn-language terminological dictionary and orthographic dictionary, spoke at the Cottbus conference on the topic of the modernization of Rusyn vocabulary in eastern Slovakia.

Nieder Rickenbach, Switzerland. The Benedictine Monastery in this small Swiss village was the site of an international seminar, "Church Music in Various Slavic Traditions," held on September 27-29, 1996. The seminar was practical in nature, addressing problems faced by directors, voice teachers, and choristers. The eastern churches were represented by ten different traditions, including that of Carpatho-Rusyn church music. Speaking on that topic was Marija Cholosnjaj a Vojvodinian cultural activist from Djurdevo, Yugoslavia.

Prague, Czech Republic. On October 22-23, 1996, the Society of Friends of Subcarpathian Rus’ based in Prague sponsored a scholarly conference entitled Central Europe and Subcarpathian Rus’.

Czech Republic. More than fifteen scholars and cultural activists from Canada, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Slovakia, and Ukraine spoke on various aspects of the past and present situation of Rusyns in Subcarpathian Rus’ (Transcarpathia) and in the Prešov Region of Slovakia. Of particular interest were talks by several Czechs, both scholars who analyzed the manner in which Rusyns and Subcarpathian Rus’ have appeared as themes in Czech literature, as well as Czech novelists and poets who themselves have been inspired by their exposure to Rusyn culture. The conference was organized by Dr. Jiří Hořec, a noted Czech writer and founding chairman of the Society of Subcarpathian Rus’.

The proceedings of the conference will be published in the series of booklets issued by the society.
**Since the Revolution of 1989**

**Kiev, Ukraine.** On June 28, 1996, nearly five years since Ukraine declared its independence, the country adopted its first post-Communist constitution. Several clauses are of particular interest to Carpatho-Rusyns, of whom the vast majority in Europe live within the borders of Ukraine, specifically in that country's Transcarpathian oblast (historical Subcarpathian Rus').

Clause 2 of the constitution declares that "Ukraine is a unitary state." The only exception to this administrative framework is the Crimean peninsula, which has been granted the status of an autonomous republic called Crimea (Clauses 134-139). Ukraine's constitution does make provisions for "local self-government" (Clauses 140-146), but this applies only to the level of villages, groups of villages, or cities. This means there is no constitutional provision that would allow for the realization of autonomy (samouprava), which 78 percent of the inhabitants of Transcarpathia voted for their region on December 1, 1991, the very same day and on the same referendum that all citizens of Ukraine voted on their country's independence.

Clause 11 of Ukraine's constitution is also of interest to Carpatho-Rusyns, since it declares that aside from the Ukrainian nationality, the state "also assists in the development of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious distinctiveness of all indigenous peoples and national minorities of Ukraine." The problem with this otherwise democratically inspired clause is that the Ukrainian authorities do not recognize that Carpatho-Rusyns are distinct from Ukrainians. Therefore, they are unable to receive any governmental assistance to promote, for instance, the Rusyn language as an element of their distinctiveness as an indigenous people in the Carpathians.

It is not only within Ukraine that the new constitution fails to provide any cultural rights for Rusyns as a distinct people. The government of Ukraine is also concerned about the existence of Rusyns beyond its borders who are recognized as a distinct group in the states in which they live (Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia). As such, they are entitled to and receive assistance for cultural activity from their respective governments.

Earlier in 1996, Ukraine's Minister for Nationalities and Migration, Volodymyr Jevtuch, stated that his ministry created a special "commission of experts" to study the "Rusyn problem." Minister Jevtuch declared from the outset that he considers Rusyns to be "Ukrainians with specific ethnographic characteristics," and that the government does not intend "to interfere in ethnocultural and ethnographic development." (Interview with Minister Jevtuch in Novyny Zakarpatt'ja, 22 June 1996, p. 4). Such tolerance does not extend to those Rusyns who consider themselves a distinct people, however.

As for Rusyns elsewhere, the government of Ukraine protested to the government of Yugoslavia against the latter's hosting of the Third World Congress of Rusyns in May 1995. Twice in the course of 1996 parliamentary delegations from Ukraine protested to their counterparts in Bratislava against the existence of the Rusyn movement in Slovakia. Most recently, during the week of October 21, 1996, a governmental delegation from Kiev requested to meet in Bratislava with Slovakia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in order "to discuss" one topic: why has the Rusyn language been approved for instruction in Slovak elementary schools?

**Prešov, Slovakia.** On August 22-25, 1996, the international organization for promoting the cultures of national minorities in Europe, La Maison des Pays, held its second congress at the Aleksander Duchnový Theater in Prešov. The meeting was jointly sponsored by Daniel Tarsis, General Secretary of the Council of Europe, and Ivan Hudec, Minister of Culture in Slovakia; its host in Prešov was the Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusyn'ska Obroda).

Representatives from fifteen nationalities throughout Europe, including Occitans from France, Piedmontese from Italy, Lusatian Sorbs from Germany, and Roma (Gypsies) and Hungarians from Slovakia, met for three days under the leadership of the president of La Maison des Pays, André Roparz (Brittany) and the organization's general secretary, Marcel Meaufront (Provence). Among the topics discussed were concrete steps to improve the status of the languages and cultures of national minorities, to increase contacts and exchanges among minorities, and to expand the organization among the peoples of east-central Europe.

The Rusyns of Slovakia are one of the founding members of the Maison des Pays. At the Prešov meeting, Rusyns from all countries were present and their status was discussed in several presentations at the international meeting. Vasyl' Turok, chairman of the World Council of Rusyns, was elected vice-president of La Maison des Pays.

**Prešov, Slovakia.** On August 24, 1996, the World Council of Rusyns (Svitova Rada Rusyniv) met for the second time this year. Present were council members from all countries where Rusyns live: Aleksander Franko (Slovakia), Andrej Kopča (Poland), Paul Robert Magocsi (United States), Tibor Mikloš Popový (representing Gabor Hattinger, Hungary), Ivan Turjanycja (Ukraine), Michael Varga (Yugoslavia), and the chairman of the World Council, Vasyl' Turok.

Among the topics discussed were: (1) the upcoming Fourth World Congress of Rusyns to be held in Budapest, Hungary, in May 1997; and (2) the need for the World Council to reassert that its primary goals are cultural and socioeconomic and that it functions within the context of existing state structures in Europe. In that regard, the following resolution was adopted:

1. Any person who is a member of the Provisional Government (in Exile) of Subcarpathian Rus' may not be a member of the World Council of Rusyns.

2. In activities sponsored by the World Council of Rusyns and its organizations no member of the Provisional Government of Subcarpathian Rus' may participate in an official capacity representing the government-in-exile.

3. At the Fourth World Congress of Rusyns in Budapest, the World Council of Rusyns will adopt a formal resolution that distances itself from the Provisional (Exile) Government of Subcarpathian Rus'.
Five of the six voting members of the World Council accepted the resolution; one member (Ivan Turjanyjka) was opposed. The resolution is to be published in the official publication of each member organization of the World Congress, including the *Carpatho-Rusyn American* of the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center.

**Užhorod, Ukraine.** A literary scandal unfolded during the month of September 1996 following the publication a few months earlier of a collection of Rusyn poetry by the Subcarpathian writer Ivan Petrovcij. Entitled *Naši spivanky* (Our Songs), the work includes 24 poems of various length dealing largely with recent developments in the political and daily life of Subcarpathian Rus' (Transcarpathia).

Sometime in mid-September, a governmental advisor brought the book to Ukraine's president Leonid Kučma, who reportedly reacted with dismay to at least one poem, “Prizident na pidstavky” (The President on a Prop), in which the author Petrovcij refers to Ukraine's first president, Leonid Kravčuk, as an eternal Communist, and to the present head of state, Kučma, as someone who cannot even speak Ukrainian.

Petrovcij's often satirical verses provoked even greater anger among the political opposition led by former dissident Vjačeslav Čornovil, who in the presence of several party leaders demonstratively proclaimed to President Kučma that Petrovcij's book of poems is “anti-Ukrainian, anti-presidential, anti-parliament, and anti-state.” Čornovil's own popular party newspaper ran an extensive article entitled, “Transcarpathia, How Sad You've Become” (*Čas*, Kiev, September 20, 1996, p. 3), which expressed special fury over the poem, “Kolomyjky for Galician Nationalists,” in which Petrovcij writes:

> Germans were once fascists,  
> As were the Magyars,  
> But the worst fascists in the world  
> Are Galician [Ukrainian] nationalists.

Spurred on by the Ukrainian displeasure all around him, President Kučma felt obliged to do something. He called his presidential representative in Transcarpathia, Serhij Ustyc, chided him for allowing the appearance of such a book in Ukraine, and requested that he question for possible legal charges the seven sponsors (many of whom hold local governmental positions in Transcarpathia) as to why they helped fund the book’s publication. The Užhorod printing firm Patent has already been charged with printing seditious material, and the Union of Ukrainian Writers is considering expelling Petrovcij from its ranks.

For his part, Ivan Petrovcij is pleased that his book has become an instant “best-seller,” and acting on his momentary fame, he has decided to enter the electoral race for a recently evacuated seat in Kiev's national parliament, and requested that he question for possible legal charges the seven sponsors (many of whom hold local governmental positions in Transcarpathia) as to why they helped fund the book’s publication. The Užhorod printing firm Patent has already been charged with printing seditious material, and the Union of Ukrainian Writers is considering expelling Petrovcij from its ranks.

As one newspaper commentator wrote: “The scandal goes on, and there are already reliable rumors afloat that a World Committee has been established to defend the author and the sponsors of the politicized Rusyn volume *Naši spivanky*. Whatever the outcome, one thing is certain: this whole matter concerning Rusyns is sure to enter the pages of history.” (*Edinstvo plus*, Užhorod, September 21, 1996, p.3).

**Prešov, Slovakia.** On October 26, 1996 a congress (sejm) of the Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusyn’ska Obroda), the main civic and cultural organization of Rusyns in Slovakia, met to discuss the present and future status of their people. The congress reviewed the achievements of the past few years and discussed at length how to overcome the present financial crisis caused by the government's general cutback in subsidies to cultural organizations.

The congress adopted a working paper entitled, the "Rusyn Renaissance Society Until the Year 2000." This document outlined seven areas (structural problems, relations with political parties and churches, cultural activity, schools, cooperation with other organizations, the press and other mass media, the economy) in which the organization needs to direct its attention.

Among its main concerns are: (1) to obtain a Rusyn language radio program that would broadcast in the eastern part of the country as well as throughout Slovakia; (2) to assure Rusyn-language instruction in elementary schools at least two to three hours weekly; and (3) to establish a department of Rusyn Language and Culture at the Pedagogical Faculty of Šafárik University in Prešov no later than 1997. The document also reiterated its previous stance that it supports no particular political party and that it does not act in favor of either traditional Rusyn church to the detriment of the other. The organization does, however, support the use of the traditional Church Slavonic liturgy instead of Slovak in both Greek Catholic and Orthodox parishes where Rusyns form the majority.

Considering the high number of persons living in other parts of Europe and North America whose ancestors are of Rusyn heritage from Slovakia, the Rusyn Renaissance Society intends to call upon the Slovak National Cultural Association (Matic Slovenská) to establish a section devoted to Rusyns from Slovakia living abroad. With regard to possible cooperation with its Ukrainian-oriented rival, the Union of Rusyn-Ukrainians of Slovakia (SRUS), this will only be possible if “that organization will recognize and respect the existence of a distinctive Rusyn nationality” and cease using the artificial term Rusyn-Ukrainian.

The congress of the Rusyn Renaissance Society also created a new organizational structure. The coordinating committee will henceforth consist of the head and one other member from each of the regional clubs, and it will meet as a body twice a year. Day-to-day business will be conducted by a newly-created five-member executive board based in Prešov, comprised of the organization's new chairman, Vasyľ Turok; vice-chairman, Professor Myron Sysak; executive secretary, Aleksander Zozuljak; and two members, Peter Krajinjak and Fedir Vico.