FROM THE EDITOR

As the Fourth World Congress of Rusyns, slated for May 30-June 1 in Budapest, approaches, the excitement and anticipation mount. The Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center will be represented by a ten-person delegation. All of us have a command of one or more Slavic languages and thus will be able to circulate among the crowd and to participate actively in the proceedings.

A plenary session will open the congress, at which Hungarian government officials will greet the various delegations from Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, the United States, and Yugoslavia. The heads of the six groups, as well as the chair of the World Congress, VasyT Turok, will offer reports on activity since the last congress which was held in Ruski Krstur, Yugoslavia, May 26-28, 1995. The delegates will then divide up into at least three commissions—economic development, culture, and scholarship—make short presentations, and engage in discussion. Performances by the Duchnovyc Theater from Prešov and a new Rusyn folk ensemble from Hungary will fill the evenings. Then there is the beautiful and elegant old city of Budapest on the Danube River, where we anticipate a warm welcome not only by our Hungarian-Rusyn hosts, but also by the Hungarian government which has been so graciously supportive of its Rusyn minority.

And herein lies a great irony, which is strongly illustrated by the articles in this issue of the C-RA. The Hungarians, who for hundreds of years before World War I were masters of the Rusyns and Rusyn-inhabited lands, have been generous toward Rusyns in the post-Communist era. But not so our own close kin, the Ukrainians of Ukraine, with whom we share ancient common Slavic roots. Where the Hungarians have encouraged their Rusyn citizens to revive their native culture, and have, for instance, purchased Rusyn-language texts published in Slovakia for the use of Hungarian-Rusyn schoolchildren, the government of Ukraine and Transcarpathia continue to deny the existence of Rusyns. Certainly, there have been problems for Rusyns in Slovakia and Poland now and then, but despite these problems Rusyns have made advances, at times even with the help of the governments of those two countries. Not so in Transcarpathia.

In fact, as one of our writers in this issue suggests, one cannot avoid seeing certain parallels between the behavior and policies of today’s Ukrainian government toward Rusyns and the policies of the former Stalinist Soviet Union toward Ukrainians.

If there was one thing which the Stalinist Soviet government could not abide, it was any grassroots movement or initiative arising from the people themselves. All aspects of society were determined by those in power. Resistance on the part of the people was met with indifference and harsh reprisals. One need only recall peasant resistance to Stalin’s forced collectivization of agriculture at the end of the 1920s and beginning of the 1930s, most of which incidentally took place in Ukraine. When peasants resisted collectivization, Stalin ignored their concerns and imposed a requisitioning of grain. He subsequently ignored the resulting famine that claimed the lives of millions and continued to export grain abroad in exchange for hard currency to support his massive industrialization program. The basic principle? Ignore the reality, ignore the people’s concerns and suffering, and at all costs force a solution according to some official doctrine. No matter if the doctrine contradicts reality.

The Ukrainian government, operating in a Stalinist mode, continues to ignore the results of the 1991 referendum in which a 78 percent majority of citizens in Transcarpathia voted for autonomy within Ukraine—not for secession from Ukraine. And in this mode, the government desires to wreak vengeance on the perpetrators of the “crime” of Rusynness by decreeing that the reality which those perpetrators know so well and love—their identity as Rusyns—is not real, not legitimate, and is even criminal.

Further reminiscent of Stalinist times in today’s Ukrainian attitude toward Rusyns are the unintentional contradictions lurking in every corner of the official government policies, contradictions which betray the truth of the situation. Take the ten measures outlined in our article, STALINISM OR TSARISM IN PRESENT-DAY UKRAINE. These measures are the recommendations of various government ministries and departments on how to solve the “Rusyn problem.” Point Two, for instance, suggests implementing “a series of measures to strengthen the Ukrainianness of Transcarpathia (in terms of language, culture, choice of personnel, etc.).” But surely, we ask, is this not a contradiction? If Transcarpathia is already Ukrainian, as they claim, why should it be necessary to teach the people how to be Ukrainians? Why should it be necessary to ukrainianize—in terms of language and culture—a people who are already Ukrainian?

Point Three forbids any referendum on self-identity, such as was part of the 1991 referendum. It recognizes that there persists in Transcarpathia an “old and still vibrant tradition among the people of calling themselves Rusyn.” But surely, if the citizens of Transcarpathia are already Ukrainians, then why after all these years are they still referring to themselves as Rusyns and have even formed Rusyn-oriented organizations?

The reality, of course, is that if a government has to “ukrainianize” some of its citizens, it is because they are not in fact Ukrainians. If a government has to forbid any discussion of self-identity, it is because it fears that the statistics will reveal results contrary to the official policy. But this is not all. Point Ten goes yet further to threaten legal action against those espousing Rusyn identity who “can be found to violate the provisions of the Law Code of Ukraine dealing with rights of assembly and association,” a code open to broad interpretation and thus easily abused by those in power. Stalin’s broad interpretation of Soviet law regarding dissenters allowed him to send tens of thousands to their deaths. Alarming also in the midst of all this is the dismal condition of Transcarpathia’s economy and the rape of its environment, as Dr. Jevhenij Župan’s article describes.

Is it not time for Rusyns in Transcarpathia to be allowed, as citizens of Ukraine, to enjoy the right to have their own identity and to exercise a wiser local control over their own territory? Is it not time for the new democracy of Ukraine to recognize its Rusyn citizens, now that the rest of the world acknowledges Rusyns whose existence will be proclaimed loudly and clearly—and already for the fourth time—at the next World Congress of Rusyns meeting just a short distance from the Ukrainian border?
IVAN HARAJDA (1905-1944)

Like many cultural and civic activists from Subcarpathian Rus' during the first half of the twentieth century, the name of Ivan Harajda was until quite recently virtually unknown. This is because the new Soviet rulers who annexed the region in 1945 deliberately set out to expunge from the historical record all persons who were not Communists or who, they believed, were somehow opposed to the Soviet Union. Since the fall of Communism in 1989-1991, the name of Harajda is being mentioned in some circles once again as the author of a Rusyn-language grammar which some people praise and others denigrate as inappropriate for the inhabitants of Ukraine's Transcarpathia. Thus, even in death Harajda's name and memory are being used and misused because of the needs of contemporary politics.

Ivan Harajda's entire, if relatively short, life was fashioned largely by political events well beyond his control. He was born in 1905 in the Carpatho-Rusyn village of Zaričovo, which at the time was within Ung/Už county of the former Hungarian Kingdom. He came from a family of elementary school teachers that included his maternal grandfather, Ivan Torma, and his father, Andrej Harajda, principal of the school in Zaričovo.

When World War I ended and Subcarpathian Rus' became part of Czechoslovakia, Harajda's father refused to swear an oath of loyalty to the new state. As a result, the young Ivan was packed off with the family to resettle in Šéfesfehervár, not far from Lake Balaton in postwar western-central Hungary. After finishing high school in that town, Ivan graduated from the law faculty of the University of Budapest (1928). Two years later he was awarded from Poland a fellowship at Jagiellonian University in Cracow where he eventually received a master's degree in history (1934). Harajda decided to remain in Poland and became an assistant professor at Jagiellonian University where he taught the Hungarian language.

When World War II broke out in September 1939 and Nazi Germany destroyed Poland, Harajda, like most other Jagiellonian University professors, was arrested by the German secret police (Gestapo) and interned in Germany at the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The Hungarian embassy in Berlin eventually arranged for his release, and in May 1940 he was allowed to return to his parent's home in Hungary.

In the meantime, Czechoslovakia had fallen and Subcarpathian Rus' was reannexed to Hungary. The new regime set up a Subcarpathian Academy of Sciences (Podkarpatske obščestvo nauk) in Užhorod, and in 1941 Harajda was invited to return to the land of his birth to become the institution's director. The young, unmarried historian and language teacher was about to apply his scholarly and his yet unknown organizational skills with what turned out to be great success.

During the next four years, as war raged throughout much of Europe, the Subcarpathian Academy published a monthly journal of cultural and civic affairs (Literaturna nedilja), a scholarly journal (Zorja/Hajnal), a children's journal (Rus'ka molodež), an annual almanac (Kalendar), and several series of books that included literary works (30 volumes), children's books (11 volumes), and scholarly studies (40 volumes). All were edited by Ivan Harajda and all were published in the Rusyn language. Aside from such editorial work, Harajda also published the results of his own scholarship in medieval history, linguistics, and perhaps his most outstanding achievement (with Nykolaj Lelekać), the first comprehensive bibliography (1944) of published works about all aspects of Subcarpathian Rus' and Rusyn culture.

It was in the field of the Rusyn language, however, that Harajda was to become best known at the time and eventually remembered. In 1941, he published a grammar of the Rusyn language (Hrammatyka rus'koho jazyka), which was adopted by the school system in Hungarian-ruled Subcarpathian Rus'. During the previous twenty years of Czechoslovak rule, the Subcarpathian "language question" remained unresolved, and Russian, Rusyn, and Ukrainian were all taught in local schools. Now, Rusyn according to Harajda's grammar was considered the official regional language alongside Hungarian. As a result, a whole generation of young people in Subcarpathian Rus' came to realize that their Rusyn language was worthy of being taught in schools and for use in publications of all kinds, from children's books to scholarly treatises.

The "Rusyn era" in the cultural history of Subcarpathian Rus' was to be short-lived, however. In the autumn of 1944, World War II was coming to a close and the Soviet Army had reached Subcarpathia. Within a few weeks, the Soviet secret police (the NKVD and its SMERSH unit) began rounding up all who had worked with or under the Hungarian regime. Harajda was arrested and interrogated, but before sentencing he died of a heart attack after a month of imprisonment in December 1944. His relatives were denied their request for a Christian burial and the place of Harajda's earthly remains are unknown to this day.

Harajda's work on behalf of Rusyn culture was deliberately forgotten until the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since then his memory has been "resurrected," although it has become a source of controversy. Local Rusyns argue his work proved that Rusyn was a viable language and that his grammar should serve as the basis for a new literary standard; local Ukrainians also have begun to praise his achievements during World War II at the Subcarpathian Academy of Sciences, but they single out as an exception his "odious grammar." Thus, in death as in life, Ivan Harajda is still being tossed about by the political agendas of others.

Philip Michaels
STALINISM OR TSARISM IN PRESENT-DAY UKRAINE

On December 1, 1991, the citizens of Ukraine were asked to vote in a referendum and to choose whether or not they wanted an independent state. More than 90 percent voted yes. That same day, and as part of the same referendum, the citizens of one region of Ukraine, called Transcarpathia, were asked whether or not they wanted “self-governing status” (autonomy) for their region. Over 78 percent voted yes.

Six years later Ukraine has its independence, but Transcarpathia has not been granted autonomy. Moreover, the government of independent Ukraine has refused to recognize the will of 78 percent of Transcarpathian voters and seems ready to accept the recent recommendations of its ministers of foreign affairs and of justice that “autonomy for Transcarpathia, whether on cultural, ethnic, or administrative territorial grounds... has no hope of being realized.”

If refusing to grant autonomy were not enough, Ukraine's government also refuses to recognize that a percentage of the indigenous East Slavic inhabitants of Transcarpathia wishes to identify as Rusyn, which they understand to be a nationality distinct from Ukrainian. The refusal to recognize the right of individuals to identify themselves as they wish is in violation of agreements signed by Ukraine as part of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe: that “to belong to a national minority is a matter of a person’s individual choice”; and that “persons belonging to national minorities can exercise and enjoy their rights individually as well as in community with other members of their group,” including “persons across frontiers with whom they share a common ethnic or national origin.” (CSCE meetings in Copenhagen 1990 and Geneva 1991).

But why should the United States and other democratic countries be concerned with Ukraine’s conduct toward some of its citizens? This is quite simply because since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine has become a key element for stability in Europe. Of all the countries of the former Soviet Union, Ukraine receives the most foreign aid from the United States. In fact, Ukraine is today the third largest recipient of American foreign aid of all countries in the world.

American foreign policy makers have justified their support of Ukraine on the following grounds. To avoid political instability and to assure independence for former Soviet countries, massive foreign aid is needed to stabilize the economies of the region’s new states. Ukraine, moreover, has fulfilled a basic condition of American support by adopting a democratic constitution and by guaranteeing for the most part human rights for its citizens.

There is an one glaring exception, however, to Ukraine’s otherwise admirable record. That exception is the far western (oblast) of Ukraine called Transcarpathia, which borders on Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Poland. It was not until 1945 that Ukraine acquired Transcarpathia, when Stalin convinced Czechoslovakia to cede the region to the Soviet Union. Formerly known as Subcarpathian Rus’, Transcarpathia enjoyed autonomous status under Czechoslovakia between 1919 and 1939. That autonomy had been guaranteed by international provisions agreed to at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919-1920. Even Hungary, which tried to hold on to the region in 1918 and then reannexed it in 1939, acknowledged that the tradition of political autonomy for the region had somehow to be addressed.

After the Soviet Union annexed the province in 1945, all considerations for autonomy were banned. To help justify its new territorial acquisition, the Soviet authorities simply declared that the indigenous East Slavic inhabitants were Ukrainian, whether or not the people themselves believed this to be the case. Ukrainians, both non-Communist and Communist, agreed with the Soviet viewpoint. Hence, for nearly the next half century, the Rusyn nationality was banned in Soviet Transcarpathia as well as in neighboring, Soviet-influenced Communist Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, and Hungary, where Rusyns also lived.

With the freedom that became possible in the wake of the Revolution of 1989 and the fall of the Soviet Union, a certain number of people who for over four decades were officially declared to be Ukrainian reasserted their Rusyn national identity. Organizations to promote this idea sprang up between 1989 and 1991 in Ukraine’s Transcarpathia, as well as in neighboring Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia (where a Rusyn nationality was never banned). In Slovakia, the former Czechoslovak federal government even recognized the Rusyn nationality in its census of 1991, and Poland and Hungary followed suit by listing Rusyns, or Lemko-Rusyns, as a distinct group in its new laws concerning national minorities.

Aside from demands to recognize the Rusyn nationality, activists in Ukraine’s Transcarpathia also called for the renewal of their region’s historic autonomous status. In 1990-1991, a special commission appointed by the Transcarpathian Regional Assembly (Oblastna Rada) recommended a concrete plan for autonomy, and in November 1991, then chairman of the National Parliament (Verkhovna Rada) and Ukraine’s first democratically-elected president, Leonid Kravchuk, himself proposed the text of a question on “self-governing status” for the referendum in Transcarpathia. He even expected that autonomy would be implemented within a few months after the December 1 referendum.

When this did not happen, President Kravchuk blamed Ukraine’s Parliament for stalling on Transcarpathian autonomy. There were even plans to create a “free economic zone”
in Transcarpathia as a way to get around “political” autonomy. When the central government refused to move on any aspect of autonomy, and when the Transcarpathian Regional Assembly dropped its own previous demands for autonomy, local Rusyn activists decided to keep the issue alive by declaring the existence of a Provisional Government of the Autonomous Republic of Subcarpathian Rus’. Headed by Professor Ivan Turianytia, a deputy to the Transcarpathian Regional Assembly, the Provisional Government wishes to restore the region’s autonomous status, but within the framework of Ukraine. It is important to remember that the Provisional Government’s leaders are not proposing to secede from Ukraine, despite the accusations of separatism levelled against them by their political enemies.

The government of Ukraine has not been moved by the calls for Transcarpathian autonomy and recognition of a distinct Rusyn nationality within its borders. Instead, it has ignored the 1991 referendum with its 78 percent majority in favor of autonomy and has adopted in 1996 a constitution that provides for a unitary state. In October 1996, just a few months after the new constitution was ratified by the country’s parliament, the government of Ukraine commissioned its ministries and governmental departments to provide recommendations on how to resolve what it calls the “problem of Ukrainian-Rusyns.” The result is a list of ten “proposed measures” from various ministries and governmental institutions to be implemented immediately or on an on-going basis (see the text below).

The “proposed measures” clearly recall Stalinist times. Regardless of what Rusyns may believe about their identity, and whether they live within the borders of Ukraine (Transcarpathia) or in neighboring countries, the document begins from the premise that there is no such thing as a Rusyn nationality. According to Ukraine, all Rusyns are Ukrainians. Nor should the government of Ukraine only be concerned with “the Rusyn problem” within its own borders. It should also interfere in the affairs of neighboring states (Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia) by supporting local pro-Ukrainians in those countries in their struggle against Rusyns.

The “proposed measures” deny the basic human right to identify oneself as one wishes, they reject the will of a clear majority (78 percent) of voters in favor of autonomy, and they call for interference in the internal affairs of neighboring states. As such, they clearly reflect a Stalinist mode of thinking and political action, and have nothing to do with the principles of democracy that are struggling to be implemented throughout post-Communist Europe on the eve of the twenty-first century.

Alas, the Ukrainian attitude toward Rusyns recalls an even earlier time, the era of harsh tsarist Russian rule over Ukraine. This was a time when Russians denied that Ukrainians existed as a distinct nationality and subordinated them to being nothing more than a regional group that they called “Little Russians.” Now that Ukraine is an independent state, it has created its own subordinate people, “Little Ukrainians,” by denying that Rusyns exist as a distinct nationality and instead referring to them as “Ukrainian-Rusyns.”

There is no reason why Rusyns cannot function in their native region as a distinct nationality loyal to the state of Ukraine and to enjoy the same rights accorded to other national minorities in Ukraine, such as Russians, Poles, Jews, Crimean Tatars, Germans, etc. Instead, Ukraine has chosen to deny Rusyns their basic human right to self-identity in their own homeland.

The sad irony is that Ukrainians are treating others as they had once been treated. This is something that even an investigative reporter from L’viv, the center of Ukrainian nationalism, was forced to admit (Andrii Kviatkovskyi in Post-postup, 1992):

Let’s recall our own history. The ‘creeping steps of Russification’ during the 18th and early 19th centuries led to a kind of success, but following the Ems Ukase [1876] and Valuev circular [1863] with their statements [that the Ukrainian language] “never existed, does not exist, and cannot exist,” the result was a counter-reaction that in fact led to a new wave of the Ukrainian national revival...

And how dangerous is the Rusyn movement for the idea of a united Ukraine? ...

And does the Rusyn movement have a future? Yes, it does, and first of all because it is reacting to the Ukrainian position that a ‘Rusyn language and culture has not existed, does not exist, and cannot exist.’ How can one explain such a thesis to an ordinary Transcarpathian when Rusyn newspapers, journals, elementary schools, and gymnasias do exist in Yugoslavia... and when such institutions ... are today coming into being in Slovakia, Hungary, and Poland? And who created the World Congress of Rusyns, if not the Rusyns themselves? I realize that all these are not very pleasant things for sympathizers of a united Ukraine. And for me they are not pleasant either. But we cannot be ostriches and try to hide from such realities by sticking our heads in the sand!

Julian Galloway
PROPOSED MEASURES FOR RESOLVING THE PROBLEM OF UKRAINIAN-RUSYNS

1. Clearly define and declare, on the basis of the Constitution of Ukraine, in particular paragraph 2, the position of the Ukrainian state concerning all ideas of separation or autonomy for Transcarpathia, whether on cultural, ethnic, or administrative-territorial grounds, since none of the above has any hope of being realized. Charge the embassies of Ukraine in each of the above-named countries all necessary means to produce and distribute such material. (For implementation in 1996).

   Ministry of Foreign Affairs
   Ministry of Justice, National Academy of Sciences

2. Implement a series of measures designed to strengthen the Ukrainianness of Transcarpathia (in terms of language, culture, choice of personnel, etc.) and to integrate the region’s inhabitants in the socio-political and religious-cultural framework of Ukraine. Create a government interdepartmental working group to coordinate the activity of various ministries and governmental departments with regard to carrying out the above measures. (For implementation in 1996-1997).

   Ministry of Culture and the Arts
   Ministry of Education
   Transcarpathian Oblast State Administration

3. Prevent holding any local referendums whose goals are to determine the “self-identity” of the Ukrainians of Transcarpathia; that is, whether they are Rusyns or Ukrainians. In the first place, on scholarly grounds such a question is in principle an incorrect one. Secondly, the existence of an old and still vibrant tradition among the people of calling themselves “Rusyns” could influence the outcome of such questionnaires and color subsequent political interpretations of the results. For instance, a similar questionnaire in eastern Slovakia provided a so-called “legal basis” for recognizing the Rusyns of Slovakia as a distinct nationality. (For implementation on an on-going basis).

   Transcarpathian Oblast State Administration

4. Create a permanent government interdepartmental working group to coordinate the study of the Rusyn problem. (For implementation in 1996).

   National Academy of Sciences
   Ministry of Education, Ministry of Culture and the Arts
   State Committee for National Minorities and Migration

5. Establish a scholarly commission and introduce the necessary precise definitions for the planned enumeration of nationalities and languages [in Ukraine]. The object is to work out a final variant of an official List of Nationalities and Languages in Ukraine. (For implementation in 1996).

   National Academy of Sciences, Ministry of Statistics

6. Prepare for the public at large scholarly works that explain the ethnic linguistic, cultural, and political aspects of the history of the Ukrainian-Rusyns of Transcarpathia as an integral part of the history of the Ukrainian people. (For implementation in 1996-1997).

   National Academy of Sciences
   Ministry of Education

7. Make use of the authority vested in the local self-governing administration according to paragraph 11 of the Constitution of Ukraine as well as by the state law “On the Principles of Local Self-Government in Ukraine” (after its passage by Ukraine’s National Parliament), in order to resolve the linguistic and cultural problem in the region within the framework of the self-governing bodies in the Transcarpathian oblast. (For implementation on an on-going basis).

   Local Self-governing Administrative Bodies in the Transcarpathian Oblast
   Transcarpathian Oblast State Administration

8. Implement a series of measures for the ideological, material, personnel, and cultural support of Ukrainian communities in eastern Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia, and Poland by each of the undersigned governmental bodies. (For implementation in 1996-1997).

   Ministry of Foreign Affairs
   State Committee for National Minorities and Migration
   Ministry of Education
   Ministry of Culture and the Arts
   Ministry of Information
   Society for Relations with Ukrainians Abroad

9. Distribute widely through the mass media materials about Transcarpathia, emphasizing the fact that this region is an age-old Ukrainian land, and that the local Ukrainians are an indelible part of the Ukrainian nation. (For implementation in 1996-1997).

   Ministry of Information
   State Commission for Television and Radio Broadcasting

10. Undertake clearly defined and preventative work with leaders and activists of the “political Rusynism” movement, with the goal to avert the spread of their influence and their ability to create political structures with clearly defined separatist goals. Apply to members of the unregistered regional branch of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, and the “provisional government” which it has created, the appropriate norms of the existing administrative and criminal law code (paragraphs 187-188 of the criminal code of Ukraine). Apply administrative measures against activists in the registered branches of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns (in the towns of Užhorod, Mukachevo, Svaljava) in those cases where they can be found to violate the provisions of the Law Code of Ukraine dealing with rights of assembly and association. (For implementation on an on-going basis).

   Office of the General Prosecutor
   Ministry of Internal Affairs
   Transcarpathian Oblast State Administration
THE HUMANITARIAN AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION IN SUBCARPATHIAN RUS' TODAY

The following remarks were delivered by Jevhenij Župan at an international conference, “Subcarpathian Rus’ in Europe,” that was held in Prague in October 1996. A medical doctor by profession, Župan also serves since 1994 as a deputy in Transcarpathia’s Regional Assembly (Oblastna Rada), where he has frequently spoken out on behalf of the cultural and political aspirations of Carpatho-Rusyns in Ukraine. The translation from the Rusyn original was done by Paul Robert Magocsi.—Editor

Rusyns, who number about 800,000 out of a total population of 1.3 million, represent the predominant portion of the indigenous inhabitants of our region of Subcarpathian Rus’/Transcarpathia. Aside from Rusyns, our region also includes Magyars, Germans, Ukrainians, Russians, Romanians, Czechs, and Slovaks among others. The Rusyns, who are one of the oldest Slavic peoples, have shared with the world their culture, rich language, and distinct traditions and customs. Several of our outstanding leaders have together with other Slavic activists made important contributions in science and culture.

At the very outset, I wish to note that until the end of World War II we were considered and functioned as Rusyns in our own homeland. After 1919, we were according to international law part of an autonomous entity called Subcarpathian Rus’ within Czechoslovakia. By 1938, Subcarpathian Rus’ received wide-ranging autonomy with its own government and ministers. After 1944, following the arrival on our territory of Soviet troops, it was in their presence that the so-called Council of People’s Committees was formed. Following Stalin’s instructions, that council called for the unification of Subcarpathian Rus’, which at the time was called Transcarpathian Ukraine, to the Soviet Ukraine. Even under such circumstances, Subcarpathian Rus’ was annexed as a distinct state entity which later, in 1946, the Soviet Ukraine abolished and transformed into the Transcarpathian region (oblast).

The treaty that transferred Subcarpathian Rus’ to the Soviet Union was signed by Ždeněk Fierlinger, Czechoslovakia’s ambassador to the Soviet Union, and by Vjačeslav Molotov, Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, without the agreement of our government and in the absence of a popular referendum. This was in violation of international law. At the same time, the prewar governmental leaders of Subcarpathian Rus’ headed by Prime Minister Avhustyn Volosyn were interned in Stalin’s prisons. Moreover, when after the war Soviet identification papers were being issued to each citizen, our nationality was abolished and every Rusyn was administratively declared to be a Ukrainian.

In such a barbaric fashion the Stalinist system liquidated our nationality and our statehood. As Stalin said at the time, if there are no people, there are no problems. In other words, if there are no Rusyns there is no problem of statehood. Since all of us were transformed into Ukrainians, and since all Ukrainians enjoyed Soviet-style sovereignty, why would “Transcarpathian” Ukrainians need any kind of autonomy.

After the fall of the Soviet Union and the formation of newly independent states, Rusyns expected that historical justice would be done and that our nationality and autonomy would be returned to us. In actual practice, in all neighboring states bordering on Ukraine, the rights of Rusyns have since 1989 been recognized; only we Rusyns in Ukraine are not recognized.

On December 1, 1991, at the same time a national referendum was held regarding the independence of Ukraine, in Transcarpathia/Subcarpathian Rus’, a question was asked about autonomy (special self-governing status) for Transcarpathia within the context of an independent Ukraine. Seventy-eight percent of the region’s inhabitants voted for autonomy. The results of the referendum were then confirmed by our Regional Assembly (Oblastna Rada). Nevertheless, until today the will of the people has been ignored, the referendum’s decision has not been implemented, and our special status has not been incorporated into the new constitution of Ukraine.

In 1992, our Regional Assembly recognized the Rusyn nationality and turned to the National Parliament (Verchovna Rada) of Ukraine with the request that it, too, recognize officially our nationality. As result of that request, a “decision” came down that a nationality such as Rusyn does not exist.

We then turned to the Supreme Court of Ukraine regarding the abolition of our statehood in 1946 by the presidium of the National Parliament of (Soviet) Ukraine. The Supreme Court’s response was that at present there are no state organs in Ukraine that have the legal competence to decide such matters. Considering the fact that Ukraine has become a member of the Council of Europe and has agreed to abide by that body’s democratic principles, we feel obliged to turn to the European council in order to help us attain our legal rights.

It must be said that Rusyns are known for their peace-loving, friendly, industrious, tolerant, and law-abiding characteristics. Despite the fact that several peoples live in our region, Transcarpathia has never experienced any violent acts motivated by national differences. For instance, during the first Czechoslovak republic (1919-1938) our homeland became a refuge for the elite of the Russian and Ukrainian intelligentsias who had fled from the totalitarian regime in their homeland.

It was during the interwar years, when Subcarpathian Rus’ was part of Czechoslovakia, that we experienced the best of times. By 1938, our region had 463 elementary schools where the Rusyn language was taught. There were also Czech-, Hungarian-, German-, Russian-, and several Ukrainian-language schools. Even during the war years, 1939-1944, we were able to be educated in our native Rusyn language. And we even had our own Subcarpathian Academy of Sciences which during otherwise difficult times was able to publish the works of our classic authors—Aleksander Dychnovyč, Aleksander Pavlovyč, Aleksander Mitrak, Ivan Sil’vaj, and others.

Today, we wish to attain justice for our people in a peaceful and legal manner. We are neither extremists nor separatists. We wish to have autonomy in order that our region can enjoy its fullest development.
Our region is unique, with its beautiful mountains and valleys, streams and rivers, and its rich natural resources. Older people who have lived through several regimes [Austro-Hungarian, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Soviet], report that never before was the quality of life so poor and difficult, not even during World War II. The present tragic situation of our people is clearly something we have not seen for centuries.

Since World War II, Transcarpathia, with its generally poor and only limited amount of habitable land (which works out to 0.15 hectares per person), has experienced a relatively high in-migration of people from other parts of Ukraine. The policy of settling people from elsewhere has created in our region a demographic imbalance and social tensions. This is because such conditions threaten the traditional mentality and aspirations of our people to build one's own house and to economize to the fullest in order to have a piece of land and raise some livestock. In that regard, our people have a reputation in many lands as good builders.

The tragedy we now see all around us is difficult to describe. More than 75 percent of our people are out of work, and those who are working often do so without pay. Rates of unemployment are much higher in Transcarpathia than in other parts of Ukraine. Our people, therefore, are forced to look for work abroad [Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic], and not in other parts of Ukraine, where even if there is work it goes unpaid or is paid very poorly. Those who go abroad work 13 to 15 hours every day, without any holidays, doing the most difficult manual labor jobs that are underpaid. They reduce their food intake in order to save some money to bring to their wives and children at home and then again return abroad to undertake serf-like labor. They do not see their families for three to six months at a time, then after one or two weeks at home (too short to do any effective work on their farms), they return abroad to work in conditions that expose them to stomach infections, tuberculosis, and various other traumas and diseases. Besides that, they must hide from the police because they are working illegally.

Others, who are lucky enough to live near the border, try to hide a few cartons of cigarettes which they hope to sell when they go abroad in order to bring back a few dollars to their families. As for those who remain at home to work, they are not in a very enviable situation. Aside from the fact that they receive only a miserable few kopecks for their work, they are not even paid that much for four to five months at a time.

In comparison with other parts of Ukraine, our Transcarpathian region has the lowest salaries but the highest prices for goods. Adults simply do not get enough food and some are starving. In terms of calorie intake, we are at the level of the world’s least developed countries. For instance, the average daily intake for an inhabitant of Transcarpathia is 700 calories compared to Afghanistan at 1,300 calories, while the minimal level set by the United Nations when it supplies humanitarian aid is 1,700 calories. The situation is particularly difficult for older retirees who, after having given to society several years of hard work, have been repaid with extreme poverty.

Our health care system is in a catastrophic state. We have reached the stage where in hospitals there are not even the basic medicines for external use. Pre-operative rubbing alcohol and injection needles have to be purchased by the medical staff from their own salaries, which in any case they only receive after a four to five month delay.

Behind such statistics is another reality—the presence of people who avoid honest work altogether and who violate the law. Corruption, lawlessness, and crime run rampant. At the same time, the government bureaucracy continues to grow. For instance, the city government of the region’s administrative center of Uzhhorod employed a few years ago 400 persons; now it employs 1,200. The more the bureaucracy’s numbers grow, the worse the economic status of our region.

Transcarpathia once again requires a financial subsidy. It is important to note that our region is in fact able to fulfill
properly the income side of our annual budget. In return, however, we receive less than one-third of what we send to the central government in Kiev. Such economic policies are sure to lead to social upheaval. On the one hand, we are told that our region cannot support itself without an external subsidy, while on the other our proposals to the National Parliament for a self-regulating free economic zone are blocked. It is said the Transcarpathians want to live well, but that it is impossible on the basis of the region's own resources.

Where our region's money and natural resources go is unknown, but it certainly does not go toward improving our people's welfare. At present, 1 million tons of rock salt, 1.5 million square meters of lumber, several million bottles of mineral water, as well as marble, zeolite, mercury, gold, and other minerals, not to mention the income derived from the oil and gas pipelines and the international railway lines, all come from our region. We certainly could live well on the income from selling such items and even produce a surplus which we could share with other regions. Instead, the last ounce of energy is demanded from our simple workers in order to support local governing officials and a bureaucracy filled with former Communist-party functionaries. Only 5 to 7 percent of our region's inhabitants live well—the mafia and government officials.

Those same officials conclude agreements with suspect foreign companies who cut down our forests, all the while disregarding the interests of the local inhabitants. Clearly in danger is our stock of white birch trees, the largest in Europe, as well our air, rivers, and underground wells. All are being polluted, which is a threat to natural wealth that belongs not only to us but to all of Europe.

Hence, by demanding the implementation of autonomy for our region, we wish to become the masters and the caretakers of our own land. In calling for the recognition of our nationality as Rusyns—a right accorded by international law to every individual—we are simply demanding our basic human rights in Ukraine. We wish to have schools that teach in our native language, to have Rusyn-language regional television and radio programs, and to obtain support for our beautiful traditions and customs. And we certainly wish to live in peace and harmony with all our neighbors.

We have already collected tens of thousands of signatures on petitions that request recognition for our Rusyn nationality. Yet the Rusyn nationality remains forbidden in Ukraine, where the government refuses to adopt laws which would guarantee an individual's free choice of nationality and which is therefore in violation of international standards.

Today in Subcarpathian Rus'/Transcarpathia, there are a few organizations that represent Rusyn interests. The largest of these is the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, the Aleksander Duchnovyc Society, and the Organization of Transcarpathia's Indigenous Peoples. The financial situation of these organizations is difficult because of the impoverished state of our people. Besides that there is a general black-out of information about Rusyns within our region. All kinds of obstacles are placed in our path. For instance, on several occasions we turned to the present government of Ukraine with the request to have Rusyn-language programs on regional television, but these requests have been completely ignored. Even in the Regional Assembly our Rusyn deputies are not given the possibility to speak. Despite all these difficulties, we are nonetheless witnessing a rebirth of our culture and traditions. We have even succeeded last year in holding the first Festival of Rusyn culture in the city of Mukachevo.

In conclusion, I would like to call on all people in Europe who are not indifferent to the fate of our Rusyn people to help us overcome our present difficulties and guarantee our right to function as a distinct nationality. I request that you undertake a campaign to provide Subcarpathian Rus'/Transcarpathia with urgent humanitarian assistance for its children, its hospitals, and for supplies of clothing. We look forward to a better future in which we will live in a common European home alongside all other civilized peoples.

Jevhenij Župan
Mukachevo, Ukraine

POST-COMMUNIST SUBCARPATHIA

Babas in Nikes
Didos in Reeboks
Adidas shops that dominate the town square.

Where are the Lenins
And the red which burned the souls?
Where are the hammers and sickles
And the prisons which locked the thoughts?
Where are the memories of the great Soviets
And the ideology that numbed the people?

The hammer no longer bangs propaganda into minds,
The sickle no longer slices the tongues of those who think aloud.
The nightmare is over.
Subcarpathia awakes ...
It is back to work on the land,
Back to trading goods with border towns.
Farmers and horses

Businessmen and Mercedes
All travel the same road.

All strive for the same goal,
To live a good life,
An honest and prosperous one.

Cindy Magocsi
Uzhhorod
April 1996
The author of the following essay, Mychajlo Tomčanij, was born in Subcarpathian Rus' in 1945. His father of the same name was one of the leading novelists in postwar Soviet-ruled Transcarpathia. The son, who always had a talent for drawing, became during the 1980s the chief architect of the city of Užhorod, and in 1990 was the founding chairman of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, the first organization in Soviet Transcarpathia to promote the idea that Rusyns were not Ukrainians, but a distinct people. Considering his political views and the difficult economic situation after the establishment of an independent Ukraine, the young Tomčanij emigrated with his family to Budapest in 1993. The son, who always had a same name, was one of the leading novelists in postwar Hungary. This essay, translated from Ukrainian by Paul Robert Magocsi, was written in July 1991, just a few months before Tomčanij moved away permanently from his native land.—Editor

When I was a six-year old boy, my father brought me to see my grandfather Ivan Tomčanij, who was living in the village of Horjany, which is today a suburb of Užhorod. Although he was already very ill, he was able to see the drawings I showed him. Grandfather looked at them for a long time and, although he did not say a word, I noticed that tears were falling from his eyes. He bowed down to hug me, and with a voice that was shaking said: “You really draw well, Mychasyk. Could you draw for me my horses? I would really like to see them.”

Grandfather had four horses which together with a piece of land he bought from the money he earned working eight years in a Pennsylvania mine. But then came the post-World War II years. Transcarpathia was annexed to the Soviet Union and Stalinist terror began to sprout up all over Subcarpathian Rus’. People began to disappear for no reason —some because of their democratic views, others because of their religious faith, still others because they were of a nationality not in favor at the time. It is very difficult to imagine what people felt when suddenly, from one day to the next, they found themselves in a country that brutally wiped out the autonomous rights of their small Slavic republic, Subcarpathian Rus’, and that deprived them of their Rusyn nationality, their Greek Catholic religion, and their property. They also took everything from grandfather. In the end, he was unable to survive such blows and fell seriously ill.

The next time I saw grandfather it was in a hospital where I brought him my drawing of his horses. He took the drawing in his hands and began to weep: “You’ve really drawn them beautifully, Mychasyk. It’s as if they are alive. They look exactly like my horses.” This man, who was the epitome of strength and who stoically survived so many difficult tests that fate had dealt him, was now weeping like a child. Perhaps he recalled how he was devastated with grief when in that one instant the authorities took everything from him, and then how he went to the head of the state-owned cooperative farm (kolhoz) and asked to work in the stables, just so he could see his horses. Grandfather barely survived another three years. We buried him on a freezing Christmas day in 1953.

The image of my grandfather as someone who is pure and good has remained engraved in my memory as a symbol of the quintessential Subcarpathian Rusyn. Even today I see in grandfather the fate of my Rusyn people and how life has scattered them throughout the world. Wherever they have gone, their honest and hardworking hands have transformed the land into blooming orchards and wheat-filled or rye-filled fields. My grandfather’s life is part of the history of my people. He is like those Rusyns who remained in America and through diligent work contributed to their new homeland which is proud of the Rusyns who went there. He is also one of those Rusyns who until his last dying breath remained in his suffering ancestral homeland where he drank to the fullest the harsh cup that fate dealt the people living there.

In the drawing that accompanies this essay (see OUR FRONT COVER), I wanted to tell not only the story of my grandfather, but at the same time the story of my Rusyn people. I have called the drawing “Grandfather’s Memoires.” It shows me on my knees alongside grandfather’s bed as he relates the story of his life. As he bids me a final farewell, he hopes that by telling me his life story he can warm my soul. In fact, that warmth still fills me and gives me strength to get through all of life’s difficulties. Behind me there is a Christmas tree, while scattered on the floor of hard-packed clay is straw through which are visible walnuts. Beyond the Christmas tree is an angel with bells in its hand, who has come to announce the birth of Jesus Christ and to bring us gifts. Outside, a group of children is caroling.

In his gigantic-sized hands, grandfather is holding his little piece of land with his house, next to which his pregnant wife and two sons are standing. Alongside them are peacefully grazing the two horses he loved so much. The far left of the drawing reminds us of when grandfather, with a bag over his shoulders, stepped across the ocean on his way to America.

Grandfather’s life is the epic account of my Rusyn people. And if this can be rendered symbolically through a drawing on a single sheet, there is not enough paper to describe that same story in words.

I am sending to you, my dear brothers and sisters in America, this drawing as a momento from the Rusyn homeland whose sons and daughters you are and always will be. May God protect you and bring happiness to your life. and may you never forget that in this world there is a place, however small, where your people will always be waiting and where you can come and drink the pure and enriching spring water that flows from the slopes of our Carpathian mountains.

Mychajlo Tomčanij
Užhorod, Ukraine
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A Forum on Carpatho-Rusyn Heritage

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OUR FRONT COVER

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