

E. Michna

**«THE RUSYN'S HISTORY IS MORE BEAUTIFUL
THAN THE UKRAINIANS'».
USING HISTORY IN THE PROCESS
OF LEGITIMIZATION OF NATIONAL ASPIRATION BY
CARPATHO-RUSYN ETHNIC LEADERS
IN TRANSCARPATHIAN UKRAINE**

According to B. Szacka, in the case of human communities, for some unknown reasons the distant past is one of the factors which have a sacralizing power. That which has a past, especially a long past, is perceived as something of greater value than something which lacks such a past. A long past is synonymous with permanence and indirectly justifies the right to existence¹. Such a validation and legitimization is necessary especially in the case of national communities. A nation without a history is impossible to think of and national aspirations need historical legitimacy: hence the longer and more beautiful its history, the better. According to a nationalistic principle, all nations have a noble and educational past, which only has to be uncovered². This is so because a nation is rooted in the past by its unique historical heritage which makes it distinct from others and which gives it a social and cultural tradition which is specific and easily identifiable³.

Characteristic for ethnic groups and nations, a mythical construction of the past is a significant element of a group's identity. As Maria Bobrownicka states, the starting point for understanding national and cultural identity is the history (facts) and its mythologization through emotive interpretation of its history and popular historiography. The source of mythologizing of one's history is a conglomerate, in different proportions, of authentic

¹ Szacka B. *Czas przeszły, pamięć, mit*. Warszawa, 2006. S. 49.

² Smith A. *Nacjonalizm*. Warszawa, 2007. P. 180.

³ See: *American Ethnic Politics* / Ed. by H. Fuchs. New York, 1968.

knowledge of the past (grand syntheses of national history and the development of the political thought) as well as both written and oral (folk) literature⁴. Correspondence with the facts is not of primary importance here; history as historical memory is important as long as it fulfils the integrating function, maintains group integrity, supports and strengthens its identity⁵.

T. H. Eriksen⁶ represents a similar approach to the history as he believes that nowadays history is also used as a tool to create identity in politics. Therefore, history is not a product of the past but a reaction to the needs of the present. Such an approach assumes a changeability of interpretation of history together with the change of a group's situation. The interpretation of the past validates the present and allows the individual to understand it. Not all events in the history of a group are present in the mythologized version of the history because not all events in the history are useful in constructing such an image of the world which could justify the contemporary reality and group aspirations. The past is used selectively, it is appropriated, and remembered or reinvented⁷.

Representatives of different groups can claim their rights to the same historical heritage. In such a case, when adducing the same events, each group interprets them in their own way which allows to state that it is just this group which has an exclusive right to such an interpretation. Currently, historical myths are especially present among those who are searching for the roots of their identity and who, through creating their own tradition, make themselves distinct from others through their noble past⁸.

Adducing to the past, ethnic myths, the history and traditions is also a basis of national and ethnic ideologies. Mythologized knowledge about the past describes the world as important and coherent, thus being a significant element of the ethnic and national identity⁹. The ideological image of the past which is emotionally important to the group members' is, on many occasions, a result of rediscovering one's own tradition — the «invention of tradition». Groups which search for justifications of their own ethnic/national aspirations select and interpret historical facts, figures, and other elements of culture in such a way that the mythical picture of the world desired by the group appears together with the expected symbolic meanings. Hence, some events and people that fail to fit the desired model of the world, and are dysfunctional from the point of view of the group's interests, disappear from the historical arena whereas others take on a disproportionately great importance.

The ethnic revival which can be observed since the mid 1980s is tightly connected with the democratization of social life in the Eastern bloc. The spreading movement of liberating and emancipating of nation, nationalities and ethnic groups in this part of the continent was accompanied by the emergence of a variety of forms of memory minority groups for whom recovery of their own past constitutes an integral part of the struggle for their own identity.

⁴ *Bobrownicka M.* Patologie tożsamości narodowej w postkomunistycznych krajach słowiańskich. Kraków, 2006. S. 5–14.

⁵ For details, see: *Petersen W.* On the Subnations of Western Europe // *Ethnicity. Theory and Experience* / Ed. by N. Glazer and D. P. Moynihan. Cambridge, Mass., 1975. P. 177–209.

⁶ See: *Eriksen T. H.* *Ethnicity and Nationalism. Anthropological Perspectives.* London, 1993.

⁷ Cf.: *Chapman M., McDonald M., Tonkin E.* Introduction — *History and Social Anthropology // History and Ethnicity* / Ed. by M. Chapman, M. McDonald, and E. Tonkin. London; New York, 1989. P. 1–21.

⁸ See: *Mach Z.* *Symbols, Conflict and Identity. Essays in political Anthropology.* Albany; New York, 1993.

⁹ Cf.: *Ibid.* P. 45–50.

Before I get to the analysis of the history which Carpatho-Rusyn leaders in the Transcarpathian Ukraine¹⁰ use to legitimize their national aspirations, it is necessary to introduce certain information concerning the Carpatho-Rusyns and the Carpatho-Rusyn movement.

Carpatho-Rusyns are a group of Ruthenian mountain people who have their own autochthonic territory on the northern (the Lemko Region) and southern (Subcarpathian Rus', Prešov Region) of East Carpathian Mountains, on the borders of Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine. It is an Eastern Slavic community of the most western location. Carpatho-Rusyns are a typical group of an ethnic and cultural borderland. Despite an affinity with Ukrainian culture, its culture and language show more specific features, which is a result of cultural influences from neighbouring groups and a lasting existence within the borders of countries related to a western civilization. In their history, the Rusyn territories have been part of Hungary, Poland and then the Habsburg monarchy; Czechoslovakia and Poland in the interwar period; and Poland, Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union after World War II¹¹.

In the 19th century, the peasant Carpatho-Rusyn population became involved in processes involving establishing of nations. Both the Russians and the Ukrainians tried to win the Rusyns over in their fight for national self-determination. Apart from that, in different periods of history, Hungarians and Slovaks on the southern and Poles on the northern part of the Carpathian Mountains showed their aspirations to assimilate the Rusyns as well.

For the today's situation, the greatest meaning had the rivalry for the «government of Rusyn souls» between the representatives of three orientations: Old Ruthenian whose activists referred to the traditions of the Kievan Rus'; Rusophile propagating a union of all Ruthenian nations and stressing the relations of the Ruthenian territories with Russia; and Ukrainophile adducing the Cossack tradition and recognizing a separate nation from the Russian nation — Rusyns-Ukrainians.

The rivalry between proponents of the opposing political-national programmes led to disintegration of the group's identity. For a long time, the ideological disputes among proponents of individual national options were taking place among a small group of the local intelligentsia. The folk masses remained within the world which was divided into the «own» and the «foreign». In the interwar period, the rivalry of the representatives of different national orientations began to have a more Massie character. The Rusophile and Ukrainophile ideology began to exert influence on broader social circles. In the 1930s, an idea emerged which, while referring to the old Old-Ruthenian ideas, clearly articulated a Carpatho-Rusyn nation understood as the fourth Eastern Slavic nation¹².

¹⁰ The article is based on empirical research conducted between 1995 and 2003 on leaders of the Rusyn movement in Slovakia, Ukraine and in Poland. The subjects of the research were: historical sources of the contemporary Carpatho-Rusyn movement, institutionalizing of the community life of Carpathian Rusyns after 1989, ethnic identity of Rusyn leaders and the Rusyn ethnic ideology.

¹¹ For details, see: *Michna E.* Kwestie etniczno-narodowe na pograniczu Słowiańszczyzny wschodniej i zachodniej. Ruch rusiński na Słowacji, Ukrainie i w Polsce. (Polska Akademia Umiejętności. Prace Komisji Wschodnioeuropejskiej. Vol. VIII). Kraków, 2004.

¹² For details, see: *Bruski J. J.* Rusini Karpaccy — separatyzm czy przebudzenie narodowe? (Z genezy współczesnego rusinizmu) // *Regionalizm a separatyzm — historia i współczesność* / Red. M. Wanatowicz (Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Śląskiego. Nr 1492). Katowice, 1995. S. 158–179; *Magocsi P. R.* *The Shaping of a National Identity. Subcarpathian Rus' 1848–1948.* Cambridge, Mass.; London, 1978.

After World War II, the Rusyns' situation changed fundamentally. By considering all Rusyns as Ukrainians regardless of their self-identification, the communist authorities of Ukraine, Slovakia and Poland hindered the shaping and popularization of the Carpatho-Rusyn nation as well as the pro-Russian sympathies. All discussions and disputes among the intelligentsia on the group's national membership ended. Only the democratization in the countries of the Eastern bloc after the year 1989 allowed the Rusyns to express their own aspirations and endeavours. The new possibilities have led to an enlivening of Rusyn intelligentsia circles in all countries inhabited by the Rusyns. In Slovakia, Ukraine and in Poland, ethnic organizations were established and the Rusyns' leaders have returned to the discussions about the nationality of their group which started in the mid-19th century¹³.

The essence of the contemporary Carpatho-Rusyn movement was best expressed by Paul Robert Magocsi, a historian and Ukrainist who has been researching these issues and a Rusyn ideologist and an involved activist who perceives the movement as striving for preserving their own culture and language, among others. The fundamental aim of the Rusyn leaders is to distinguish a fourth Eastern-Slavic nation apart from Russians, Byelorussians and Ukrainians. The movement is accompanied with many disputes concerning the aims the ethnic leaders of the group set as well as the validity of their demands. The aspirations of the Carpatho-Rusyn leaders are particularly attacked from the Ukrainian positions. The Ukrainians and Russians of a Ukrainian national awareness (who consider Carpathian Rusyns as an ethnographic group of the Ukrainian nation) see in them a «political rusynism», a harmful separatism aiming at changing the borders in Europe and at weakening the Ukrainian state.

For the Carpatho-Rusyn ethnic leaders, it is a fundamental issue to define themselves in relation to the Ukrainian group. This is so for two reasons. First, the pursuit of self-determination as a nation and the existence of the fourth Eastern Slavic nation, as mentioned above, are being especially questioned and blocked by the representatives of the Ukrainian group, who consider the Rusyns as members of their own ethnos. Therefore, we are dealing here with a clash of two distinct nationalisms, each of which wants to bring the same population into the orbit of their own national influences. Secondly, the cultural closeness of the two groups seems to be important as slight objective cultural differences require constructing a clear border at the symbolic level if one group wishes to differ from the others. The analysis of utterances of Carpatho-Rusyn leaders in all regions indicates that, regardless of the objective cultural features on symbolic and mythic levels, Rusyn ideology is based on clear and distinct division between «us» and «them». These leaders' vision of the world is constructed in such a way as to supply arguments confirming the distinctness of the Rusyn group from the Ukrainian one.

In this article, the issue I am interested in is the way in which ethnic leaders use their histories to justify the separateness of the Ukrainian and Rusyn groups. Using the history to legitimize national aspirations is not a new phenomenon in the case of the Rusyn group as it appeared during the last wave of ethnic revival in the 1980s. However, as early as the late 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century, when the indifferent from the national standpoint Carpatho-Rusyn population was included within the

¹³ For details, see: *Michna E.* Kwestie etniczno-narodowe na pograniczu Słowiańszczyzny wschodniej i zachodniej...

processes of establishing nations, competitive interpretations of history occurred which were to justify the Rusyns' inclusion in a specific nation.

The first works on the history of the southern part of the Carpathian Mountains appeared at the beginning of the 19th century. It was the time of romantic fascinations with the past and attempts to construct comprehensive historiographic concepts. A mixture of facts and pseudoscientific myths, the syntheses of the history which were created at that time were «at the nations' service» and aimed at justifying their then aspirations and pursuits. P. R. Magocsi, who analyzed the works of the 19th-century historians as well as those of the beginning of the 20th century, believes that we can talk about a few different attempts to interpret the history of the Subcarpathian Rus' connected with the political interests and national option of the authors who conducted the interpretation: Old-Ruthenian/Rusyn, Hungarian, Russian and Ukrainian¹⁴.

The basic interpretative controversies among the 19th-century historians pertained to the following issues: autochthony of the Rusyn population in the Carpathian Mountains and its presence on these territories before the arrival of the Hungarians in the year 896; the range of the Wallachian colonization; the existence or non-existence of an independent Rusyn state (so-called *Marchia Ruthenorum*) governed by Rusyn rulers; the activities of Cyril and Methodius on the Rusyn lands; the importance of individual nationalities in the development of the region; the union of all Eastern Slavic nations and right to the heritage of Kievan Rus'; the relations between Subcarpathian Rus' and Galicia, and the Rusyns' national separateness; the meaning of the name «Rusyn» in different historical periods¹⁵.

Nowadays, similarly to the late 19th century and the early 20th century, the discussion continues about the history of the group, in which both historians and ethnic leaders participate, the latter willingly referring to historiographical works when searching for arguments to support their thesis on the existence of a separate Rusyn nation. In the process of constructing their own distinctness, the representatives of the Rusyn intelligentsia reinterpret the history. Under the fundamental premise of the Rusyn ideology, all utterances of the leaders concerning the group's history are subordinate to the basic for the Rusyn ideological thesis that the Rusyns are not Ukrainians.

In this context, therefore, let us examine the basic elements of the Carpatho-Rusyn vision of the history which is to legitimize the group's contemporary aspirations to be the fourth Eastern Slavic nation.

Ethnogenesis

The belief in common origin is a significant element of ethnic and national awareness. No wonder that the group which has become aware of its distinctness in relation to other national or ethnic groups and aims at its national self-determination faces the necessity to explain the secret of its provenance, and the conviction of common ontogenesis becomes a significant element of the national ideology. Present in the mythologized

¹⁴ See: *Magocsi P. R. The Shaping of a National Identity...*

¹⁵ *Ibid.* P. 24–30.

vision of the history, the conviction does not have to be based on facts. As U. Altermatt¹⁶ and G. Babiński¹⁷ state when adducing the popular and common definition of a nation, the belief in common origin in the case of traditional communities takes on the form of ethnic myths and nowadays has the character of scientific and pseudoscientific concepts. Groups which desire to reconstruct their identity again during a revival period often refer to their mythic forefathers.

The majority of the Carpatho-Rusyn leaders from the Transcarpathian Ukraine draw their roots from the legendary tribe of the White Croats, which lived in the Carpathian Mountains already in the 5th century. The myth of the Rusyns to be the descendants of the White Croats has a great importance for integration of the group and legitimization of its contemporary aspirations. The following is one of the utterances which illustrates this type of thinking:

«There are many concepts, all of them have a political character. The European history says that, for the Yugoslavs, for Serbians, Croatians and Slovenes, here is the heart of their mother country, the motherland [...] I didn't contrive that the Duchy of the White Croats was here, the science recorded it»¹⁸.

A separate category of respondents are the scholars active in the Rusyn movement, who usually know all hypotheses regarding the ethnogenesis of the group very well and they do not want to favour either of them. However, in the multiplicity of concepts and lack of unequivocal conclusions, they do see room for those which are accepted by the group:

«There are many ideas regarding the origins of the Carpatho-Rusyns and neither one can be made absolute. None of them has been proven. None can be made absolute because there are no written documents. I think, as the archaeological research in the Prešov region confirm this, that these are old Slavic tribes which could have emerged on the entire Slavic territory. At that time, there were no divisions among the Slavs. This was the area to which migrated the southern Slavs. There are many Serbian family names among us but there were also Old-Ruthenian elements connected with the migration of the nations [...] This theory about the White Croats is not bad, if they were our ancestors then that's not bad at all, however it can't be proven scientifically».

The interlocutors who claimed that there were many concepts regarding the provenance of the East Slavic population of the Carpathian Mountains and were not for the choice of any particular one, did not give the answer to this question pleading their incompetence, stressed that the Rusyns have been living on their territory for ages, «since always», «ever since they can remember», and that they are the autochthonic population in the Carpathians. For those interlocutors, it is not important where the Rusyns come from. For them, their centuries-long presence on this territory is more important:

«The Rusyns have been living here for at least one thousand years. And no science can take this away from us, we are not some newcomers here, we have lived here for a thousand years. It doesn't matter what the theory is, whether since the 7th or the 9th or any other century. But we

¹⁶ Altermatt U. Sarajewo przestrzega. Etnonacjonalizm w Europie. Kraków, 1998.

¹⁷ Babiński G. Pogranicze polsko-ukraińskie. Etniczność, zróżnicowanie religijne, tożsamość. Kraków, 1997.

¹⁸ All quoted comments come from interview with the leaders of the Carpatho-Rusyn movement and are quoted **in extenso**.

have been living here for one thousand years [...] I did not come from any Ukraine. My father lived here, my grandfather lived here, my great grandfather. We were born on this land, Slovakia is here now, but earlier Czechoslovakia, Austro-Hungary, Hungary. But here on this territory we live, and not that we came from somewhere. If we came, then in the 6th century, the 9th century, but the last 1000 years we have been living here».

«In any case, the Rusyns have their own independent history, independent from the Ukrainian one. I wouldn't like to talk about the ancient history — till the year 1000. Although already in that period one can talk about colonization — this region is certainly older than that. This is an Old Slavic area. But where they came from and when, that's not my sphere. I can't answer that question precisely, however I know that the Rusyns have lived here for about ten centuries and that time is sufficient for us to feel at home here».

The analysis of the collected material points to a very important issue, namely the ethnic leaders' exploiting and using the White Croats concepts for strengthening the borders and distinguishing their group from the Ukrainian one. A majority of the respondents believes that this concept, regardless of its authenticity, is an important argument in the discussion with the Ukrainians and allows them to prove the distinctness of Rusyns' from Ukrainians:

«For contemporary Rusyns it could be so important who their forefathers are, but it is important to have arguments. For the civilized world, one doesn't have to look for arguments — there is a right to self-determination, self-identification. But Ukraine doesn't allow us, therefore we must look for our own historical roots to prove that we are distinct. We must find scientific arguments to prove that we don't belong to Ukraine or to Russia; we have our own history here, our own roots.

The fact that we come from White Croats allows to prove that we are a separate Slavic nation. Already during the times of the Soviet Union there was a talk that we come from the White Croats when it was forbidden to talk about the Rusyns. It is of great importance to us because the entire Ukraine's propaganda is directed toward proving that we are the Ukrainian nation, some branch of theirs. All forces of the Ukrainians historians are focused on proving that we are not a separate nation, that we are a branch, that we were part of the Kievan Rus'. And we have our own history, our ancient roots and it is very important for the group that the White Croats were our oldest ancestors».

Some respondents stress that the descent of the group from an ancient tribe of deep historical roots has a significant psychological meaning because it has an influence on raising the group's attractiveness and, for the Rusyn community members, it may be something to be proud of. It is not the most important thing, however, whether the primogenitors were the White Croats. Those of my interlocutors who are not convinced if this particular tribe can be considered as the Rusyn protoplasts stressed the importance of the long history of the Rusyns spanning more than a thousand years:

«This is of importance for the national pride. If our opponents say that there is no such nation, then for us it is important to have evidence by Herodotus, Tacit, who registered us as Ruthenians. This confirms ourselves in the conviction that we have a right to live and be proud that our roots are deep, that one didn't come to Europe from God knows where [...] To form the national idea, to think of our prospects and of our own place among other nations, the place of our culture, the language among other cultures and languages, therefore it is very important where you come from».

Although a few concepts are considered in academic circles as the most probable and which pertain to the genesis of settlements in the Carpathians¹⁹, the majority of Rusyn activists from the Transcarpathian Ukraine are inclined to disregard them and prefer the White Croat version. The collected material shows that the Rusyn leaders' search for their roots is a significant element in reconstructing their identity. Referring to legendary ancestors and centuries long traditions aims to prove the group's continuity and legitimize the group's aspirations.

Although not all interlocutors are convinced that the White Croats were the Rusyns' real ancestors, a decided majority still believes that the concept is very useful for the group. For them, it is most important in that it allows them to make a distinction between the Rusyns and the Ukrainians, and to explain the cultural differences that the interlocutors see between the two groups. In their opinion, this concept can constitute a crucial argument in the discussions with the proponents of the national unity of the Rusyns and Ukrainians. Many of my interlocutors also stress that having a long history, reaching back to the 5th century, can contribute to increasing the group's attractiveness and be a factor which integrates members of the group. For all, the autochthony of the Rusyns in the Carpathian Mountains as well as the awareness of their centuries-long presence in these territories is significant.

The legacy of Kievan Rus'

Another issue that is crucial for the Rusyn vision of the history is the historical legacy of Kievan Rus'. In the area of the Ruthenian Duchy which was established at the end of the 9th century, the Old-Ruthenian culture had its beginnings and to which the Russian, Ukrainian and Byelorussian nations developing on these territories would refer to. Nowadays, Russians and Byelorussians point to the relations of their own history to the Kievan Rus', however it is the Ukrainians who consider themselves the main heirs of this state.

¹⁹ The ethnic issues of the ethnogenesis of the Ruthenian population in the Carpathians has a rich bibliography. For details see, e. g.: *Krasowski I.* Problem autochtonizmu Rusinów w Beskidzie Niskim i Sądeckim // *Łemkowie w historii i kulturze Karpat*. T. I. / Red. J. Czajkowski. Rzeszów, 1992. S. 281–286; *Olszański A.* Geneza Łemków — teorie i wątpliwości // *Magury*'88. Warszawa, 1992. S. 18–43; *Parczewski M.* 1) Początki kształtowania się polskoruskiej rubieży etnicznej w Karpatach. Kraków, 1991; 2) Geneza Łemkowszczyzny w świetle wyników badań archeologicznych // *Łemkowie w historii i kulturze Karpat*. T. I. / Red. J. Czajkowski. Rzeszów, 1992. S. 11–25; *Repela J.* Przegląd badań nad etnogenezą Łemków // *Wierchy*. 1991. Rocznik 57. S. 190–197; *Strumiński B.* O pochodzeniu Łemków z punktu widzenia językoznawstwa // *Magury*'91. Warszawa, 1992. S. 87–96; *Szanter Z.* 1) Skąd przybyli przodkowie Łemków? O osadnictwie z południowych stoków Karpat w Beskidzie Niskim i Sądeckim // *Magury*'93. Warszawa, 1994. S. 7–20; 2) Jeszcze o osadnictwie z południowej granicy w Beskidzie Niskim i Sądeckim // *Łemkowie i łemkoznawstwo w Polsce* / Red. A. Zięba (Polska Akademia Umiejętności. Prace Komisji Wschodnioeuropejskiej. T. V). Kraków, 1997. S. 181–203. The position of the Ukrainian authors and the bibliography of the Ruthenian settlement are discussed in: *Малець О. О.* Волохи і волоська колонізація на словацько-польсько-українському прикордонні // *Матеріали науково-практичної конференції «Державне регулювання міжетнічних відносин в Закарпатті»*. Ужгород, 1997. С. 190–198; a rich bibliography of the works of Slovakian, Hungarian, Romanian, Russian, and Ukrainian authors on the beginnings of the Ruthenian settlement on the Southern side of the Carpathian Mountains is included in the works of Magocsi: *Magocsi P. R.* 1) *The Shaping of a National Identity...* P. 465–585; 2) *Carpatho-Rusyn Studies. An Annotated Bibliography*. Vol. I. 1975–1984. New York; London, 1988; 3) *Carpatho-Rusyn Studies. An Annotated Bibliography*. Vol. II. 1985–1994. New York, 1998.

And so, for the Rusyn movement, it is the most significant issue to refer to the heritage of this Old-Slavic Duchy and to interpret the oldest history of the group so as to prove the separateness between the Carpatho-Rusyns and the Ukrainians. My Rusyn interlocutors from the Transcarpathian Ukraine for the most part negate the affinity of the Rusyn territories with Kievan Rus', stressing that they belonged to Hungary as early as the 10th century. Prior to this, in their opinion, they were protected against the influences of the Kievan rulers by the huge arch of the Carpathian Mountains which separated their territory from the remaining land of the Kievan Rus'. This is how my interlocutors spoke about it:

«In the past, the crest of the Carpathian Mountains was a very important border. It was the border which in the 10th century the Hungarians had great difficulty to cross [...] Our country has never belonged to Ukraine.

Since the oldest times, since the 10th century our history has been related to Hungary and there are records of us throughout the history of Hungary. And now, the Ukrainian historian can say that we belonged to Kievan Rus', but there are records that we have never belonged, we have never been a part Kievan Rus'».

The interlocutors who do not negate the relations between the Carpatho-Rusyns with Kievan Rus' do not see direct relations between this Old Slavic state and contemporary Ukraine. For them, Kievan Rus' and the Old-Ruthenian culture, which developed on their territory, is part of the heritage of all Eastern Slavs:

«The Old-Ruthenian culture is not the property of any specific East Slavic nation; it is neither Ukrainian nor Byelorussian nor even Russian, because when it was being created all these nations did not exist yet. At that time, no one was thinking in national and ethnic categories like they do today. We do not refer to Kievan Rus', Rus' as a state, but Rus' as a culture. It was a culture from which the culture of Eastern Slavs developed long before these main Eastern Slavic nations were shaped. So, we refer to this particular Ruthenian culture, the Old-Ruthenian one, not the Kievan Rus', which by the way had nothing in common with today's Ukraine because Ukraine in today's sense had not existed at the time.

The entire Ukrainian science is so hypocritical that they started to present the history of Ukraine as the history of some ancient, ancient civilization [...] And it is just a tiny Kievan Rus' and it is only a part of Russia, it is also a part of Russia. Such Ukraine, but Ukraine and Ukrainians emerged only in Galicia, that's Austrians' and Poles' work, their intrigue, it's only the 19th century, and when there was Kievan Rus' then nobody had heard about Ukraine».

The respondents who negated the affiliation of the Rusyn territories to Kievan Rus' often stress the centuries-long Rusyn territorial affiliation to the non-Slavic states which included the Rusyns in the orbit of the western civilization:

«These Slavs from the Subcarpathian region, they have always been part of non-Slavic states, but the democracy levels of these regimes was always higher than the level of democracy of the Eastern Slavs, inclusive of Ukrainians. This gave us a possibility to preserve our identity despite the necessity to adjust to these regimes. But this, in a sense, included us to Europe, the western influences have always arrived via these states».

As the research results show, similarly to Eastern Slavic nations, the today's Carpatho-Rusyn movement must cope with the legacy of Kievan Rus' as the birthplace of the Old-Ruthenian culture. Because the national Ukrainian movement relates to the heritage of this Ruthenian Duchy and treats Ukrainians as direct successors of this Medieval state, then, in order to differ from them, the Carpatho-Rusyn leaders negate the belonging of the

Rusyn territories to Kievan Rus' for the most part. The few respondents who search for their roots in Kievan Rus' believe that all Eastern Slavs have a right to relate to its heritage and that no contemporary Eastern Slavic nation may consider itself its exclusive heir.

The Cyril and Methodius' mission

When constructing the desired picture of the group, similarly to the revivalists of the 19th century, Rusyn leaders also refer to the mission of Cyril and Methodius, although the science sheds doubt on their presence on the Rusyn territories. According to the respondents, it was these missionaries who brought Christianity to the Rusyns. Under this concept, not only were the Rusyns baptized by St Vladimir, the Kievan ruler, but they also adopted Christianity some one hundred years earlier from the hands of the saint-missionaries of Slavic people. Here is one typical comment:

«It was not like the Ukrainians say that Vladimir christened Subcarpathian Rus'. We adopted Christianity a few decades earlier from the saints Cyril and Methodius, before even Kievan Rus' was christened. It was our ancestors who were bringing Christianity to the east. It was we who were first».

This is what another respondent said about Cyril and Methodius's mission in the Subcarpathian region and the adoption of Christianity by Vladimir the Great:

«Our history starts with Cyril and Methodius's mission. For us, it is important that this region adopted Christianity some 120 years earlier than Kievan Rus'. I we well know that our monks took part in the christening of Vladimir's the Great court. And, in this sense, we find interesting the point of view that the Christian religion came to us not from Kievan Rus', from the East, but that the Christian religion was brought to us from the western Europe first».

Such an ideological manipulation allows a break with the tradition of Kievan Rus', so uncomfortable from the standpoint of the need to construct clear borders between the Rusyn and Ukrainian groups. In my interlocutors' opinion, adopting Christianity directly from Byzantium is yet another piece of evidence that there were no ties between Kievan Rus' and the territories of Carpatho-Rusyns. The majority of the Rusyn leaders believe Rusyns to be the heirs of the tradition of Cyril and Methodius. In their opinion, it is the Rusyn nation that is the successor and the most faithful guard of the Cyril-Methodius tradition and the language codified by the Byzantium missionaries. Adopting Christianity from the hands of Cyril and Methodius is also supposed to be the proof that since the beginning of its existence the Rusyn community had closer relations with Western Europe and, through the actions of the saint missionaries of, Slavic people it was included into the cultural orbit of western Europe.

Rusyn distinctness as a result of Rusyn territories belonging to Western countries

When legitimizing contemporary endeavours and national aspiration, the interviewed leaders try to notice the symptoms of the Rusyn distinctness in its most remote past. In their interpretation of the history, it dates back to the 17th and 19th centuries. Rusyn separateness is, in their opinion, a natural consequence of the specific history of the group,

which has never in its history had any connections with Ukraine and Eastern Slavic population past the Carpathian Mountains.

«We have never belonged to Asia and have never had anything to do with anything related to it; only by Stalin's taking away the territories and annexing them to the Soviet Union decided that we, over the last several dozen of years, have been under this influence with all its consequences. But earlier, we always were part of Western countries which were much more democratic than any of the Asian states.

We are different because it was not Asia that shaped our mentality but Europe; for many centuries, we belonged to more civilized Europe, and the last several decades — that's our misfortune. You should understand because you Poles didn't want to find yourselves in the Soviet camp, either».

In the respondents' opinions, the separateness of the Rusyns and Ukrainians has its source in the long affiliation of the Rusyn territories to the Western Slavic states. The administration of non-Slavic empires (Hungary, Austria) and Czechoslovakia brought elements of Western culture into the Rusyn territory. It is from this intersection of the eastern and western influences, in the respondents' opinion, that the specific and separate Rusyn culture was born.

The Rusyns' national aspirations

The Rusyn leaders claim that we can talk about Carpatho-Rusyns' national aspirations as early as the middle of the 19th century. The activities of the intelligentsia — the national revivalists (A. Dukhnovych and A. Pavlovych)²⁰ and local politicians gives evidence that already at that time the Carpatho-Rusyns strived to preserve their identity, fought for their independence and the right to some form of autonomy. One of the interlocutors spoke of the events:

«Our endeavours for recognition of separateness started already before Dukhnovych, it all started before Dukhnovych. Because if not for the nation, Dukhnovych would not have appeared. A leader appeared. There can't be a leader when there is no nation. You can proclaim yourself a tsar, but if you don't have an empire, then you are an impostor and you mean nothing. So, I think, that this nation had existed long before Dukhnovych».

Another issue which the leaders of the autonomous movement mention when speaking about Rusyns' national aspirations are the disputes of the Rusyn intelligentsia and the lack of determination in the national belonging issues. According to my interlocutors, it was these disputes which significantly delayed the process of national integration:

«It was our misfortune that our revivalists were unable to decide who they were; we have always been under the influence of foreign states, foreign cultures. The Rusyn ethnos, the Rusyn nationality has not had its own intelligentsia and this was the reason for it that it accepted what it was imposed on, therefore there were different directions both Great Russian and Ukrainian, and Hungarian, and the Rusyn only at the end. However, being Rusyn has survived in villages and that is why it could revive, it has always had its background there, in the villages».

Rusyn leaders from Transcarpathian Ukraine are aware of the disruption of the group's identity and the existence of different political-national parties among the 19th-

²⁰ For details, see: *Magocsi P. R. The People from Nowhere. An Illustrated History of Carpatho-Rusyns. Uzhhorod, 2006.*

century national revivalists who had not fully known whether they were members of the Russian, Ukrainian or the separate Carpatho-Ruthenian nation. When speaking about the divisions, they stress that such a situation was the result of outside influences to which the intelligentsia succumbed. It is worth adding that the principal of equality and integrity of the nation and perceiving all divisions as an outside intervention and conspiracy is characteristic of the majority of nationalistic ideologies²¹. The emergence of Rusyn distinctness is, according to my interlocutors, a natural consequence of the group's specific history which has never in its history had any relations with Ukraine and the Eastern Slavic population behind the Carpathian Mountains. The Rusyn leaders locate the beginnings of the Rusyn separateness in the distant past, in the 17th and 19th centuries. In their opinion, the Hungarian documents which mention the Ruthenian population in the Carpathian Mountains, the publications prepared especially for the Ruthenians and the translations of the Church Slavonic materials into the Rusyn vernacular confirm their separateness.

The Rusyn process of creating a nation as a part of similar processes among Slavic nations of the Habsburg monarchy

It is crucial for the current aspirations of some of the ethnic leaders who are for the separateness of the Ukrainians to prove that the processes of national integration among the Carpatho-Rusyns are nothing extraordinary. On the contrary, they are typical for all Slavic nations of the Habsburg monarchy (the Eastern, Western and Southern Slavs) and that they began at the same time. The majority of the interlocutors from the Transcarpathian Ukraine present their Rusyn national aspirations in the context of the endeavours of other nations in Europe. Here is one of their comments:

«Each nation in Eastern Europe was in our situation at one time or another, only a bit earlier, but if to take into consideration the action of our revivalists, then it was not that much earlier. The Czechs had to fight with the Germans who said that they [the Czechs] belonged to them; and the Slovaks the same, Štúr did the same as Dukhnovych; Everyone has to fight for what's theirs and we are doing it now, we are fighting for what's ours».

The aspirations of these nations have come true — they were recognized as separate and obtained their own state organisms — this gives the Rusyn leaders a foundation to have their own similar aspirations to be considered justified.

Political revival after World War I

When legitimizing the current endeavours and national aspirations, Rusyn leaders also relate to the events which took place after the First World War. At that time, on the ruins of Austro-Hungary monarchy, new states were created and the Lemkos in the Lemko Region and Hungarian Rusyns were creating self-government organizations which aimed at taking over power on their territories from the Austrians. Interlocutors from Transcarpathian Ukraine present the events as follows:

«But the critical moment was when Zhatkovych, together with Masaryk, the then President of Czechoslovakia, were preparing the international thought to it that our state entered as an

²¹ *Berlin I. Nacjonalizm. Zlekceważona potęga // Idem. Dwie koncepcje wolności i inne eseje / Wybór i oprac. J. Jedlicki. Warszawa, 1991. S. 193–231.*

equal part into the then created Czechoslovakia. As you know, Czechoslovakia as a country shouldn't have been named Czechoslovakia, but Czecho-Slovak-Rusynia, the name could have been like that».

Although different political-national programmes of the Rusyn circles on both sides of the Carpathian Mountains confirm the breakup of the group's identity. In today's interpretations of these events, the Rusyn leaders stress, which can be functional from the perspective of current aspirations of the group, that already in that period some projects of uniting the Lemko Region with the territories on the South side of the Carpathian Mountains, which, due to Polish intervention, did not end with success and which show the emergence of all-Rusyn ties, and which prove that even then Rusyn politicians and activists desired to take the fate of the Rusyn nation inhabiting both sides of the Carpathians into their own hands in order to ensure it some form of independence.

The interwar period — the Rusyn «Golden Age»

The interlocutors from the Transcarpathian Ukraine consider the period of belonging to Czechoslovakia as positive and treat it as a Golden Age in the Rusyns' history. Many factors influenced this and those which the interlocutors referred to the most are presented below.

According to my interlocutors, during the interwar period, Czechoslovakia was one of the most democratic states in Europe and guaranteed the nations which became the state's part full freedom and possibilities of development:

«In the period of the Czech Republic — the interwar — here was the highest degree of democracy naturally because it was planned to grant this region a broad autonomy. Of course, there are reasons for it that Masaryk could not grant this autonomy as he should have in the 1920s, still the degree of democracy was high in Czechoslovakia. In comparison to the Soviet period which happened later, it was incomparable. Czechoslovakia allowed the development of those minorities and nations which were part of it. There was freedom for and possibilities of growth in many areas despite the fact that we had to wait for the autonomy till 1938.

There were political freedoms. Political parties could be formed. They were pro-Ukrainian, pro-Ruthenian, Jewish, German, etc. There was freedom in this respect. One could elect representatives to the parliament of the Czech Republic».

When evaluating the degree of interwar democracy in Czechoslovakia, Rusyns from Transcarpathian Ukraine often construct their utterances to juxtapose them with the Soviet system or the political reality in Ukraine of the day. In comparison with the latter, the range of civil and political liberties in the First Republic is assessed positively:

«The political life — we had (in the Czechoslovakian period. — *E. M.*) there were 14 parties and now there are 60 parties, 40 in the Transcarpathian region, but this is a parody of political life. But then, there were 14 true parties and they competed against each other [...] It was severed in 1944 and we are actually starting it from the beginning now.

What can I tell you, for us, the Best Times were in the period of Czechoslovakia because there was democracy then, true democracy, such democracy that the Soviet democracy or even today's Ukrainian pseudo Democracy can't be compared with it».

When speaking of belonging to Czechoslovakia, the majority of the respondents point to one negative effect of Czechoslovakia's democratic system and the openness of the country's authorities, i. e. the appearance in Transcarpathian Ukraine of a numerous white

emigration and, as they refer to them — «the Ukrainian nationalists from Galicia». The interlocutors claim that Ukrainians and Ukrainian ideas appeared in Transcarpathian Ukraine for the first time only in the interwar period. They stress frequently that they were artificial for the Subcarpathian Rusyns, they were not their own and that, except for a small group of the intelligentsia, they did not find any broader support:

«When after the defeat, the Soviets seized Western Ukraine, many Ukrainians fled to Transcarpathian Ukraine and they started Ukrainization there. Masaryk, as a democrat, approved of it. He was such as to say, “Well, fine, if Ukrainians are here, then let them be”. When they came to our villages in Subcarpathian Rus’, then they started convincing all that all are Ukrainians. There, white emigrants came as well and over there the great Russian and Ukrainian concepts collided. Our Rusyn one still very weak, it was not developed. The Rusynism remained aside, in villages, and drank vodka».

This is how another interlocutor spoke about the events:

«In Transcarpathian Ukraine, two opposing national-cultural directions appeared after the war. White emigrants — Russophiles and Ukrainophiles arrived. It was the intelligentsia. With Masaryk’s support, they developed educational and cultural activities. A struggle started between them. They dragged the local people into their disputes. But they were only the intelligentsia because the Rusynism at that time had not raised their own political elite or their own intelligentsia, these were just the very first steps. And they fell into the arms of Russophiles or Ukrainophiles and started to fight with each other. Before the First World War, neither these nor those were here [...] Struggling with each other, the representatives of the two directions in fact squelched the Rusyn movement, but it has continued smouldering even in the totalitarian conditions and our folk, in principle, have not adopted any of the two directions».

A few Transcarpathian leaders had a more conspiratorial theory explaining the appearance of Ukrainians in Transcarpathia:

«Austrian Habsburgs gave Czechoslovakia 15 billion crowns for it to accept Ukrainian Sichov nationalists because they came to Vienna and started trouble. The Austrians sent them to Prague and, in Prague, the socio-cultural climate started changing, because of the Sichov people — there were 45 thousand of them. They started looking for a way to throw them away from Prague. The Czechs wanted to move the Free Ukrainian University from Prague to Uzhhorod. They thought, for the Czech state not to die, we will sacrifice the Rusyns. The rector of the Free University came here, but he got a heart stroke, because the Rusyns did not receive him, they threw potatoes, tomatoes and soil at him, and he got a stroke. This was one of the first contacts with Ukrainian ideas, because earlier no one had heard about Ukrainians here».

The negative events discussed above do not overshadow the decidedly positive assessment of the Czechoslovakian period which the Rusyn leaders make. The Rusyn-ethnomystists devote a lot of room to the economic and cultural development in the interwar period as well as to the Czechoslovakian investments in the Subcarpathian region. As it follows from the respondents’ stories, the region went through a great civilizational leap in the period under the Czechoslovakian Republic. This type of argumentation appears in all interviews. They are very long and detailed stories in which the respondents enumerate in great detail the Czech investments and describe the progress in individual spheres of life. The respondents give numbers, which often differ and which are supposed to depict the development of Subcarpathian Rus’. The sense of these utterances is always the same — the Czechoslovakian period was a period of a dynamic growth of the region in all spheres of life, it is a growth whose dynamics the Subcarpathian Rus’ has never

managed to achieve any more. Moreover, many of the achievements were forfeited in the period under the Soviet Union and independent Ukraine:

«The Czechoslovakian period was the time of prosperity for Subcarpathian Rus' both in respect to the culture and materially. First of all, the Czechoslovakian government, i. e. President Masaryk, already in 1918 allocated thirty billion Czech crowns for our region of Subcarpathian Rus'. Out of this money, bridges, roads, twelve railroads were built — two of them remained as our brothers dismantled it all because they needed iron for the industry, as if they did not have the ore. Furthermore. They built Uzhhorod, the buildings of Uzhhorod, the streets, it's the same architecture as in Prague. Then, they regulated the river Uzh, the waterfronts, kilometres of a high retaining walls made of andesite, 5 m high. The entire architecture, the newer part, dates back to the Czechoslovakia period. Electric power plants were built. Schools were established in each town. Already in 1919, Masaryk said that in order to ensure the growth of Subcarpathian Rus', order should be introduced in education, schools have to be organized. Then, agriculture should be changed because agriculture was here at the Medieval level, and modernization of technical infrastructure. The best Swiss cows were imported for farms. My mother had a white and black cow, a German one, the cow weighed a ton, one thousand kilograms, but it would give 22 litres of milk from one milking. In the Ukrainian kolkhozes give 3 litres of milk. In our house, a Czech goat would give three litres of milk, just one goat. Cows, hares, ducks were imported from abroad. Agricultural schools were organized, people were trained to economize, to graft fruit trees, to raise the level of the agriculture.

First, the Czechoslovakian government, President Masaryk, had a good attitude toward the Rusyns [...] Masaryk did a great deal to preserve the local culture, national buildings and national crafts [...] There was also cultural life. Different cultural societies: "Prosvita", "Dukhnovych Society", country reading rooms which had a great role in our country. Many newspapers were published [...] We had 76 newspapers published [...] a lot was published [...] history was written, folklore text were published, there was a lot of such cultural work. It was such a golden age of our life, those years of Czechoslovakia».

For the majority of my interlocutors, despite the fact that it was granted autonomy that was promised during a Paris Peace Conference only in 1938, the rise of Subcarpathian Rus' had a great symbolic meaning. For the Rusyn leaders, it is a substitute for a national state whose character is stressed the new name — Subcarpathan Rus'. Projecting a revival of the historic Subcarpathian Rus', political activists refer to this episode in the history of the group. The creation of this, as they call it, «Rusyn state», whose creation was a result of the international community's decision, legitimizes their current endeavours.

«We, the Subcarpathian Rusyns, had our autonomous state, our rights must be reinstated. We used to have, we do not demand anything new, we had and in the Hungarian times right No. 10 of a broad autonomy of a Russkoy, or rather Rusyn state. Europe recognized us when we joined Czechoslovakia and the autonomous Subcarpathian Rus' was created. We are not like the Crimean Tartars, they have never had their own state, and Ukraine gave them autonomy, and we had already had our own state and long before Ukraine had their state. The history of our statehood is longer».

The memory of having for almost twenty years (until 1939) an autonomy with their own Rusyn educational system, certain attributes of self-government like a governor, a national anthem and a national theatre is, for contemporary Rusyn activists, evidence that even then Carpathian Rusyns were recognized by the international community as a distinct nation and they obtained at least a semblance of their own political organism.

The Transcarpathian leaders devote a lot of room in their utterances to the interwar period. For the majority of the respondents, this period is the «Rusyn Golden Age», a

mythical time when their region was developing well and the people lived much better than they do now. The respondents are inclined to idealize the two decades and overestimate the Czech investments in the region. They often stress that the creation of Subcarpathian Rus' is the proof for it that already after World War II the international community recognized the existence of a distinct, separate Rusyn nation, which legitimizes their contemporary endeavours. The interwar period is the time when, despite difficulties and dominance of Czechs, the Carpathian Rusyn could feel a significant subject of political life.

Communism — the tragedy of the Rusyn nation

In the Carpatho-Rusyn vision of history we can also find a period of a national decline, which starts after World War II. Most Transcarpathian Rusyn leaders are convinced that the year 1945 marks the beginning of the worst period in the group's history although, according to a few of the respondents, the local population received the new authorities with enthusiasm:

«From the beginning the people were happy that liberators came because there was such a propaganda that there is such a life over there, that there are such good working places, factories. But already after one week the people found out that it would be well, that this long-awaited civilization had not arrived».

The decided majority of the Rusyn-autonomists from Transcarpathia claim that Subcarpathian Rus' was annexed to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic under agreements which failed to take into consideration the will of the local community and the collected signatures which were to attest to the support for the unification with Ukraine acquired by way of deception and manipulation. This is how one of the respondents related the events:

«They did not annexed us to Ukraine, they were occupying us. Because had they annexed us, they would have organized voting. You want to Ukraine, to Russia, then cast your vote, and there was nothing like it. Stalin ordered to separate this territory from Czechoslovakia, then we were separated, agreements were signed with Czechoslovakia and that's what they did. [...] They were doing lists in villages using tricks. The Communists were walking and asking: do you want to send your children to school? — then sign. Do you want a kilo of groats? — then sign. They visited all houses, all schools, all villages — then they signed it differently and announced that all want to annex to Russia, to Ukraine».

And one more statement:

«When the army came, then they quickly organized committees which announced the unification with the Soviet Ukraine, but the committees asked nobody for their opinion».

According to what the respondents say, the First Council of National Committees, which took place in Mukachevo on 26 November 1944 and ceremonially decided about the annexing Subcarpathian Rus' to the Soviet Union and which was steered by the KGB (Eng. Committee for State Security), was a political farce. One of the respondents spoke about it as follows:

«My father was a delegate in Mukachevo and everyone had an assigned place there. My father sat with his neighbour. Turianica, the First Secretary of the Communist Party, said, "We, comrades, want to separate from Czechoslovakia, does anybody want to say anything

about it?” My father’s neighbour said, “I want to say something”. Turianica said, “What is it?” And he, “We, just like we were in Czechoslovakia, that’s where we want to stay, we don’t need to separate”. And behind him the KGB people were sitting and they are pulling him by the sleeve — and you want to go to prison. Then they did a voting and they voted, half of them were the KGB people. And that’s how they annexed Subcarpathian Rus’ to the Soviet Union, without the nation’s consent».

Together with the annexation to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, as the Rusyn leaders claim, the period of Ukrainization started. Similarly to other regions, the period was connected with orthodoxization and collectivization. Rusyns from Transcarpathia say that, from day to the next, they were «recorded as Ukrainians». Rusyn schools were closed and replaced with Ukrainian ones, and the forbidden word «Rusyn» was replaced with the term «Ukrainian». The majority of Rusyns from Transcarpathia remember the terror which prevailed at the time:

«The terror was awful. One could not protest, because those who protested were taken from here and people were scared terribly. The Rusyn nationality was liquidated. One could not declare to be a Rusyn. In my father’s family, my uncle declared as Russian, and my father, because he taught in a Hungarian school, had to declare Ukrainian. There was no other choice, one could be taken away from here for the word “Rusyn”».

Some of my interlocutors also mentioned persecutions of all those who did not agree to the policy and wanted to remain Rusyns. For the leaders from Transcarpathia, a symbol of the persecutions is the camp in Svalava:

«In Svalava, there were very many Rusyns, I can’t say how many, but the last number of those who were submitted to rehabilitation is about 20 thousand people. Some of them were Rusyns. There were Hungarians and Rusyns there. Under the veil of Hungarian fascists, they took all Rusyns [...] Nowadays, the elderly are still afraid to talk about it because they were bettered, with no water. They were standing all day in the sun, drank water and ate salted food. There was enough of it that people still remember it and are afraid to talk till this day».

In the respondents’ opinion, the persecutions and terror decided that there was no mass resistance against the policy of Ukrainization in the Transcarpathian region. One of the respondents is convinced that such Rusyns’ attitude perhaps saved the group from being expatriated:

«There was no simple rebellion that we are not Ukrainians, that we are Russians, we abased ourselves. Well, Ukrainians are Ukrainians. [...] Had our nation protested — we are not Ukrainians, we are Rusyns — they would expatriate us from this territory. [...] The communist regime had well worked out methods of assimilation.

If the Rusyns had started to strongly oppose, then many people could have ended in gulag. The Stalin regime was also able to expatriate all Rusyns as it was like in other places. So that no problem occurred, that these were not centuries-long Ukrainian territories».

The beginning of Ukrainization is at the same time effacing all traces of the Rusyn history and culture by the communist authorities. In the interviews, the motif of the order to turn over Rusyn books which were then destroyed reappears very often:

«My father had a library of 10 thousand books and he had to burn them because a man from NKWD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) came and ordered to burn. Our books were burnt, destroyed, to efface all traces, so that no one would ever hear about the Rusyns again.

Only Soviet books were used for teaching, all books were burnt, that is they took [them] from people. There were announcements to turn in all literature, so that no one dared to keep it at home. Libraries were burnt or they were handed over for recycling. Our books were used for manufacturing cardboard».

The Policy of effacing the traces, not noticing the Rusyns, their distinctness and culture was being realized till the fall of communism. Rusyns from Transcarpathia stress that for the entire post war period there was no talk about the Rusyns, the history of the region was full of «white spots», and the propaganda tried to prove the everlasting ties between Transcarpathia and Ukraine. Educational programs never mentioned the history of the region and, similarly to the media, were realizing the policy of assimilation. In the opinions of the majority of the respondents, the policy failed to bring the expected effects and, as the respondents claim, the majority of the people in the country have maintained their Rusyn identity.

The post war period, the most tragic period in the history, in my interlocutors' opinion, had the most significance for the current condition of the group and the partial assimilation of the Rusyns, and froze the development of Rusyn culture. At the same time, all interlocutors stress that Carpatho-Rusyns have not had any influence on their fate after World War II, and annexation of the Subcarpathian Rus' to the Soviet Union was forced.

We have such a beautiful history

As mentioned earlier, ethnic groups, especially nations, are sacralized by their past which legitimizes their right to existence. A nation with no history can face a charge that its origin is a result of social engineering. An appropriately long history also allows members of the nation to refute such charges. All my interlocutors stressed that the Carpathian Rusyns have a beautiful and long history.

«The Rusyns have a beautiful history, God give each small nation such a beautiful history as ours».

Many times, leaders from Transcarpathia compared the history of the Rusyns with the history of the Ukrainian nation, which, in their opinion, is neither long nor laudable:

«The Rusyns have a more beautiful history than the Ukrainians, because we already had our state, the autonomy. Everything that Ukraine has managed to get now, we already had it much earlier».

To sum up, as the analysis of the utterances of the Carpatho-Rusyn leaders from the Transcarpathia collected in the course of the research and on the basis of the existing materials, one of the strategies of legitimizing today's national aspirations and stressing the national distinction between the Rusyns and the Ukrainians is constructing an idealized picture of the group's history. Similarly to the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th century, the ideological disputes about the national affiliation of the East Slavic community in the Carpathian Mountains are taking place under the banner of returning to history. The struggle for the government of Rusyn souls is, similarly to the past, a struggle to impose on the group's members one's own interpretation of the history of the East Slavic community in the Carpathians. The basis for building the desired picture of the group and legitimizing the aspirations to be the fourth Eastern Slavic nation is rediscovering the ethnic past.

Contemporary Rusyn leaders return to the issues which used to be a subject of disputes between the proponents of different national options of the 19th and the early 20th centuries. Once again, they reinterpret the East Slavic heritage to which all Eastern Slavs refer to. The vision of the Carpatho-Rusyn ethnic leaders is based on a fundamental premise that over the course of history, until the year 1945, the Rusyns had nothing in common with the Ukrainians. They have their own specific and unique history which decided of their distinctness and which gives them the right to recognize them as a fourth Eastern Slavic nation, separate from the Ukrainians.

Резюме

По каким-то неведомым причинам далекое прошлое является одним из факторов, обладающих сакрализирующей силой в человеческих обществах. То, что обладает прошлым, особенно большим прошлым, воспринимается как нечто более ценное, нежели то, что таким прошлым не обладает. Длительная история синонимична постоянству и опосредованно оправдывает право на существование. Такая легитимация особенно важна для этнических общностей. Народ без истории невозможно представить, и потому национальные стремления требуют исторической легитимации: следовательно, чем более длительной и красивой является история, тем лучше. Националистическое мировоззрение предполагает, что народ обладает величественным и оказывающим воспитательное воздействие прошлым, которое надо только раскрыть. Это значит, что народ укоренен в прошлом благодаря своему историческому наследию, которое делает его отличающимся от других и дает ему специфическую и легко идентифицируемую социальную и культурную традицию.

Вопрос, который интересовал нас в этой статье, — это то, каким образом этнические лидеры используют историю, чтобы оправдать представление, согласно которому русины и украинцы — это отдельные народы. В случае с русинами использование истории для легитимации национальных устремлений, проявившееся в период последней волны национального возрождения в 1980-е гг., — это отнюдь не новое явление. Уже в конце XIX – начале XX в., когда индифферентное в национальном отношении карпато-русинское население было вовлечено в процессы формирования наций, имели место конкурирующие интерпретации истории, которые должны были оправдать включение русинов в определенную нацию.

Как показывает анализ высказываний русинских лидеров Закарпатской Украины, собранных нами в период между 1995 и 2003 гг. в ходе исследований современного русинского национального движения, одной из стратегий легитимации сегодняшних национальных устремлений русинов и подчеркивания их этнического отличия от украинцев является конструирование идеализированной картины группового прошлого. Подобно тому, как это было в конце XIX – начале XX в., нынешние идеологические споры о характере принадлежности жителей Закарпатья к восточнославянской этнической общности ведутся под знаменем возвращения к истокам. Сейчас, так же как и в прошлом, борьба за души русинов — это борьба за то, чтобы внушить членам группы свою собственную интерпретацию истории восточнославянского

населения в Карпатах. Основой для конструирования желаемого представления о русинской общности и легитимации стремления быть четвертым восточнославянским народом является открытие заново этнического прошлого.

Современные русинские лидеры возвращаются к вопросам, которые в XIX — начале XX в. неоднократно являлись предметом споров между сторонниками различных национальных опций. Они снова занимаются реинтерпретацией наследия, общего для всех восточных славян. Видение ситуации, свойственное русинским этническим лидерам, основывается на фундаментальной предпосылке, согласно которой в ходе своего исторического развития до 1945 г. русины не имели ничего общего с украинцами. В представлении русинских лидеров, у русинов была своя собственная, определившая их уникальность, история, которая дает им право рассматривать себя в качестве четвертой восточнославянской нации, отдельной от украинцев.