

Education System in Subcarpathian Rus during Interwar Period in the Estimates of the Rusyn Politicians and Public Figures¹

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The article analyzes origins and further development of the education system in Subcarpathian Rus after the incorporation of that region into Czechoslovak republic in 1919 as well as the attitudes of the Rusyn politicians and public figures towards various aspects of school system in Subcarpathian Rus. Since during 1920-ties the school system in Subcarpathian region reflected the policy of “soft ukrainization” of the local Rusyn population pursued by Prague administration in cultural sphere, it aroused growing criticism from Russophile part of Rusyn public and political spectrum while the representatives of Ukrainian movement in Subcarpathian region insisted on more resolute pro-Ukrainian policy in the field of education. Rise of the political and cultural confrontation between the Russophile and Ukrainian intelligentsia of the Carpathian Rusyns became one of the important reasons for the destabilization of the situation in that region in the late 1930s.

Key words: *Carpathian Rusyns; Subcarpathian Rus; education; school policy; language issue*

The end of the First World War and the collapse of Austria-Hungary meant a radical change in the history of the Carpathian Rusyns. Incorporation of Rusyn-populated lands south of the Carpathian Mountains into a newly-born Czechoslovak state during 1919 was legally fixed by St. Germaine treaty signed on September 10, 1919. According to articles 10 and 11 of St. Germaine treaty, Czechoslovakia committed itself to providing broad autonomy for Subcarpathian Rus, which had to be “compatible with the unity of the Czechoslovak state... The autonomous territory

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was to have its own governor and an elected diet with legislative functions in specific areas.”² However, extremely complicated international situation and unstable internal conditions in Subcarpathian area right after the First World War prevented Prague from introducing autonomy in that region. Since local diet, which had to decide questions of local importance including language and education system was not elected, central authorities in Prague had to solve those issues in the easternmost province of their country. This task proved to be quite complicated since Subcarpathian region was marked by high degree of ethnic and confessional diversity. In addition, broad masses of the local indigenous Eastern-Slavonic population – Carpathian Rusyns – mostly lacked full-fledged national self-consciousness and were just at the initial stage of shaping their modern national identity. At the same time, significant part of the local Rusyn intelligentsia shared traditional Russophile ideas considering local people a part of a “triune Russian people consisting of Great Russians, Little Russians and White Russians”.³ The situation in Subcarpathian region was further complicated by the influx of Ukrainian emigrants from neighboring Galicia, which contributed to the spread of Ukrainian identity among the local Rusyn population. Ukrainian national activists viewed Carpathian Rusyns as potential Ukrainians who “lacked Ukrainian national identity”⁴ and as an object of their “kulturtraeger” activities.

General Statute for Subcarpathian Rus, adopted by Czechoslovak government on November 18, 1919, provided for the introduction of the “folk language” into the field of education and public sphere. Leading Czech scholars in the field of Slavonic Studies considered Subcarpathian Eastern Slavonic population and local dialects an ethnographic part of Ukrainians and Ukrainian language.⁵ Taking this consideration into account, Czech scholars including Professor Lubomir Niederle during their session on December 4, 1919 recommended using in educational sphere in Subcarpathian Rus the “Ukrainian language with etymological alphabet as the language of instruction”.⁶

² Magocsi, P. R. (2005). Treaty of St. Germaine. In P. R. Magocsi, I. Pop (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Rusyn History and Culture. Revised and Expanded Edition*, University of Toronto Press, p. 497.

³ Shevchenko, K. (2011). *Slavjanskaja Atlantida. Karpatskaja Rus i Rusiny v XIX – pervoj polovine XX veka*. Moskva, p. 64.

⁴ Motyka, G. – Stryjek, T. – Zajączkowski, M. (2020). *Międzynarodowe aspekty akcji „Wisła”*. Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk, p. 75.

⁵ Shevchenko, K. (2009). Kulturní a národnostní politika Prahy v Podkarpatské Rusi v 1920 letech. In Koporová K. (ed.), *Studium Carpato-Ruthenorum 2009*. Prešov: Ústav rusínskeho jazyka a kultúry Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove, p. 43.

⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

It should be noticed that this view was in line with the recommendations of engineer Jaromír Nečas, an activist of the Czech Social Democratic Party and a well-known political publicist who worked for some time in the administration of the first governor of Subcarpathian Rus G. Zhatkovych. In his reports from Subcarpathian Rus to Presidential Office in Prague in November 1919 Jaromír Nečas repeatedly criticized the representatives of the Russophile camp in Subcarpathian Rus for their “Russian chauvinism”, latent pro-Hungarian feelings and “forcible imposing the Russian literary language on the population” and recommended to rely on “local direction”, to pursue a policy of “benevolent neutrality” to Ukrainians and “to refrain from introducing literary Russian language into the schools and administrative bodies in Subcarpathian Rus.”⁷ In his brochure “Hungarian Rus and Czech Journalism” published in Uzhhorod city in 1919, Nečas explicitly called for support of pro-Ukrainian cultural policy in Subcarpathian Rus arguing that only Ukrainians demonstrated pro-Czechoslovak sentiments.⁸ Similar approach was shared by other high-ranking Czech officials.⁹ As a result, the first Vice-Governor of Subcarpathian Rus Petr Ehrenfeld, who played a key role in organizing educational policy in that region, received a direct instruction from the Czechoslovak government to support Ukrainian orientation in the sphere of culture and education.¹⁰

From the very beginning, organization of educational process in Subcarpathian Rus was marked by obvious administration support of the Ukrainian orientation. Among the authors of the textbooks for primary and secondary schools in Subcarpathian region approved by Czech administration were Ukrainian Philologist from Galicia Dr. Volodymyr Birčak, representative of the local Ukrainian movement Greek Catholic priest Avgustyn Vološyn and Galician-Ukrainian Philologist and cultural activist Dr. Ivan Pankevych. According to the recommendations of Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences, “Grammar Guide” for local schools in Subcarpathian Rus prepared by Pankevych in 1922 and introduced into local school system as obligatory manual by the Head of School Department Josef Pešek, used traditional for Rusyn cultural tradition etymological alphabet. At the same time, Pankevych’s “Grammar” was focused on the norms of the Ukrainian literary

⁷ Archiv Kanceláře prezidenta republiky (AKPR), f. Kancelář prezidenta republiky, inv. č. 26, sign. PR I/26, karton 1, Zpráva ing. J. Nečase o poměrech na Podkarpatské Rusi.

⁸ Nečas, J. (1919). *Uherská Rus a česká žurnalistika*. Užhorod, p. 5.

⁹ Shevchenko, K. (2020). Situation in Subcarpathian Rus in 1919 as Reported by the Czech Officials. In *Czech – Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal*, volume 12, 1, pp. 87–88.

¹⁰ Archiv Ústavu T.G. Masaryka (AÚTGM), f. T.G. Masaryk, Podkarpatská Rus 1923, 22b, cardbord 403.

language and, as a matter of fact, prepared the local population for the gradual transition to the Ukrainian literary language. It should also be noticed that Pankevych's "Grammar" was based on the dialects of the Eastern regions of Subcarpathian Rus (Verkhovyna region), which were closest to the Ukrainian language of Eastern Galicia.¹¹

Being a consistent supporter of the transition of the Rusyns to the Ukrainian literary language, Pankevych, nevertheless, was well aware of the impossibility of its immediate introduction in Subcarpathian Rus. Therefore, his "Grammar", published in 1922, was a compromise that combined the Galician-Ukrainian grammatical basis with the traditional etymological writing and local Carpathian dialectisms. It is noteworthy that in the subsequent editions of his "Grammar" in 1927 and 1936 Pankevych, keeping the traditional Rusyn spelling, purposefully got rid of the Carpathian-Rusyn dialectisms, consistently introducing more and more elements of the Ukrainian literary language.¹² At the same time, the Russophile grammar of Sabov, the true author of which was the Russian émigré A. Grigoriev, created in opposition to Pankevych's Ukrainianophile grammar, was rejected by the Czechoslovak authorities until 1936 as a textbook for local schools, contrary to the opinion of the majority of Rusyn teachers and the public who spoke for the Russian language of instruction and for the Russian grammars.

From the very beginning the representatives of the Russophile part of Rusyn intelligentsia expressed its dissatisfaction with the linguistic policy of the Czech administration in Subcarpathian Rus and repeatedly stated that, in their view, there was nothing in common between Rusyn dialects of Subcarpathian region and the Ukrainian language of Galicia.¹³ School manuals prepared by the Ukrainian philologists and introduced into local school system by the Czech administration in Subcarpathian Rus were sharply criticized by the local Rusyn teachers during the whole interwar period. The printed organ of the Rusyn diaspora in the USA "Amerikansky Russky Vestnik" criticized the educational policy of the Czech administration in Subcarpathian region emphasizing that "nobody on our lands knew the Ukrainian language and the Ukrainian grammar... Pešek and Pankevych

¹¹ Kushko, N. (2007). Literaturni standarty rusynskoi movy: istorychnyj kontekst i suchasna sytuacija. In A. Plišková (ed.) *Jazyková kultúra a jazyková norma v rusínskom jazyku*. Prešov, p. 40.

¹² Magocsi, P. R. (1978). *The Shaping of a National Identity. Subcarpathian Rus, 1848–1948*. Harvard University Press, p. 139.

¹³ Gerovskij, A. (1977). Borba cheshskogo pravitelstva s russkim jazykom. In *Putyami istorii. Obsherusskoe nacionalnoe, dukhovnoe i kulturnoe edinstvo na osnovanii dannykh nauki i zhizni*. Tom II. New York, p. 93–97.

introduced this language into our lands...”¹⁴ An official printed organ of the Society of Teachers of Subcarpathian Rus “Narodna shkola” repeatedly criticized the school manuals prepared by Pankevych and recommended the Czech government “to stop mutilating our language”.¹⁵

In their active and quite emotional polemic against introduction of the Ukrainian language into the school system of Subcarpathian Rus, the Russophile part of the Rusyn intelligentsia appealed to the traditional cultural heritage of the Carpathian Rusyns. Thus, one of the Rusyn cultural activists Igor Gusnaj stressed long-term existence of “our own Carpathian-Russian language tradition” and stated that “we had and we do have our own Carpathian-Russian literary language... Carpathian-Russian intelligentsia without any exceptions shared the idea of cultural unity with the rest of the Russian people... Literary language of Pushkin, Gogol and Turgenev also belongs to Carpathian-Russians”.¹⁶ Arguing that the Russian literary language should be used in Subcarpathian schools for local Rusyns as the major language of instruction, Gusnaj appealed to the linguistic situation in Germany and Western European countries. In words of Gusnaj, school children in Saxony or Bavaria do not study the local dialects, but the literary German language, which is seriously different from the spoken dialects in various German regions.¹⁷

In addition to teaching schoolchildren in the Ukrainian cultural direction, local school administration sought to exert a pro-Ukrainian influence on Rusyn teachers. In early 1923 school administration of Subcarpathian Rus started publishing a cultural and pedagogical journal “Podkarpatska Rus”, which was funded from the state budget. One of the leading pro-Ukrainian activists in the region Dr. Ivan Pankevych was appointed chief editor of that magazine. Various historical, linguistic and ethnographic materials published in this magazine for the local teachers consistently promoted the idea of Ukrainian ethnic and linguistic nature of the local Rusyn population. Thus, in one of his articles published in that magazine, Dr. Ivan Pankevych interpreted local Rusyn dialects as dialects of the Ukrainian language and consistently used the terms “Subcarpathian Rusyns” and “Ukrainians” as synonyms in order to popularize the ethnic name “Ukrainian”, which then was almost unfamiliar among local Rusyns.¹⁸

¹⁴ *Amerikansky Russky Viestnik* (1922), Homestead, PA, 31 marta, № 14, p. 1–2.

¹⁵ *Narodna Shkola* (1924), 30 sentyabrya, № 7, p. 2.

¹⁶ Gusnaj, I. (1921). *Jazykovej vopros v Podkarpatskoi Rusi*. Prešov: Knigopechatnja Sv. Nikolaja, p. 3–4.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 20.

¹⁸ *Podkarpatska Rus. Chasopis prysvyachena dlyz poznanya rodnoho kraju* (1923), № 1, p. 24.

Another quite acute problem that constantly aroused criticism of the Rusyn intelligentsia was the personnel policy of the Czech administration in the education system of Subcarpathian Rus. Since old Hungarian officials and teachers were not considered by Prague as politically loyal to Czechoslovak state and since local Russophiles were suspected of pro-Hungarian sentiments, the Czech administration in Subcarpathian Rus decided to rely on the Ukrainian teachers in the field of education. In the fall of 1919, the Czechoslovak government initiated the practice of using Ukrainian Galician emigrants as teachers in primary schools of Subcarpathian Rus including the servicemen of Ukrainian Galician Army, which after unsuccessful war between Poland and Western Ukrainian Republic had to emigrate to Czechoslovakia.¹⁹

Supported by the Czech Administration of Subcarpathian Rus the process of employing Ukrainian emigrants in Czechoslovakia as teachers in Subcarpathian primary schools and gymnasiums developed successfully till late 1930-ties and resulted in the strengthening of Ukrainian identity and Ukrainian cultural orientation in Subcarpathian Rus, which aroused negative reaction among local Russophile intelligentsia. Native of Galicia and one of the teachers of gymnasium in Subcarpathian city of Beregovo V. Pačovskij stated that Rusyn education in Subcarpathian Rus was oriented on neighboring Galicia and that emigrants from Galicia, supported by Czech administration, played an important role in shaping education system in Subcarpathian Rus.²⁰ According to a contemporary and witness to those events, real situation in Subcarpathian schools and gymnasiums during the interwar period was rather chaotic. Cultural and national orientation of individual educational institutions was dependent on their leadership and teaching staff. Thus, Ukrainian teachers dominated in the gymnasiums in Beregovo and Uzhhorod cities. Director of Uzhhorod gymnasium, native of Galicia Aliskevych, „held this position for 15 years and during this period of time he managed to completely Ukrainize this educational institution“.²¹ It should be noticed that the leading representative of Ukrainian cultural movement in the region, Dr. Ivan Pankevych was also professor of the gymnasium in Uzhhorod. In addition, two Greek Catholic Pedagogical men's and women's seminaries in Uzhhorod supported

¹⁹ Shevchenko, K. (2009). Kulturní a národnostní politika Prahy v Podkarpatské Rusi v 1920 letech. In Koporová, K. (ed.), *Studium Carpato-Ruthenorum 2009*. Prešov: Ústav rusínskeho jazyka a kultúry Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove, p. 52.

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 52–53.

²¹ Gerovskij, A. (1977). Borba cheshskogo pravitelstva s russkim jazykom. In *Putyami istorii. Obshherusskoe nacionalnoe, dukhovnoe i kulturnoe edinstvo na osnovanii dannykh nauki i zhizni*. Tom II. New York, p. 95–96.

by the Czech administration used Ukrainian as major language of instruction and played very important role in promoting Ukrainian identity and culture among the local Rusyn population. At the same time, gymnasium in Mukachevo was controlled by local Russophiles. Situation in numerous primary schools throughout the Subcarpathian region was even more dependent on national and cultural orientation of concrete teachers.

After being appointed the second governor of Subcarpathian Rus in the fall of 1923, Anton Beskyd, a representative of local Russophiles, tried to end the Ministry of Education's monopoly on personnel decisions in the field of education, in the first place in terms of appointing school teachers.²² However, his attempts ended in vain and the Ministry of Education in Prague, controlled by the representatives of Social-Democratic party, continued the generally pro-Ukrainian personnel policy in Subcarpathian Rus.

Rusyn press of Russophile orientation in Subcarpathian Rus repeatedly expressed dissatisfaction with the personnel policy of central authorities in education sphere and criticized what it perceived as the domination of Ukrainians in the local school system. Thus, one of leading Russophile newspapers in February 1934 wrote with irony that Ukrainian newspapers in Lvov were publishing information about 412 teacher vacancies in Subcarpathian schools urging Galician Ukrainians to take teachers' positions in Subcarpathian Rus.²³ Subcarpathian Russophiles demanded "to free our schools and institutions from Ukrainian emigrants and transfer these places to the Carpathian Rusyns".²⁴ Leading newspaper of Rusyn Diaspora in North America "Amerikansky Russky Viestnik" from the very beginning was also negative about educational policy of Prague in Subcarpathian Rus, voicing strong criticism for what it perceived as "soft Ukrainization" of Rusyns in local school system.²⁵ At the same time, Ukrainophile part of Rusyn intelligentsia and Ukrainian press in Subcarpathian region were generally positive about the cultural and educational policy of the Czech administration in Subcarpathian Rus especially during 1920-ties.²⁶

Overall, the school policy of the Czech administration in Subcarpathian Rus had rather ambiguous consequences for Carpathian Rusyns. On the one hand, an active educational policy on the part of the state has led to a significant increase in the educational level of the local population. While in 1900 in the framework

²² AÚTGM, f. T. G. Masaryk, Podkarpatská Rus 1926–1931, 22d, cardboard 403.

²³ *Karpatorusskij Golos* (1934), 8 fevralja, № 483, p. 1–2.

²⁴ *Karpatorusskij Golos* (1934), 14 marta, № 510, p. 2.

²⁵ *Amerikansky Russky Viestnik* (1919), Homestead, PA, 16 oktobra, № 40, p. 1.

²⁶ *Svoboda* (1930), 21 oktobra, № 40, p. 1.

of Hungary the illiteracy among the Rusyns was about 70%, then by 1930 the illiteracy rate dropped drastically to 42%.²⁷ On the other hand, the administrative support of the Ukrainian direction in the educational field, especially noticeable in the 1920s, led to the strengthening of Ukrainian identity among the population and to the rise of the political and cultural confrontation between the Russophile and Ukrainian intelligentsia of the Carpathian Rusyns. This circumstance became one of the important reasons for the destabilization of the situation in this region in the late 1930s.

²⁷ Magocsi, P. R. (2015). *With Their Backs to the Mountains. A History of Carpathian Rus' and Carpatho-Rusyns*. Budapest – New York: CEU Press, p. 205.