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The Rusin Identity (A Case Study of Galicians' Participation in the Civil War)

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Русинская идентичность (на примере участия галичан в гражданской войне)

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In Polish historiography, there is a widespread opinion according to which the Rusins, unlike the Poles, are “unhistorical” people, incapable of attaining their own statehood.

Having lost statehood in the 14th century, the population of the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia or the Kingdom of Rus fought for its restoration throughout many centuries. After the “Spring of Nations” of 1848 – 1849 which caused the first Rusin revival, the Rusin public figures maintained a popular idea of creating an Autonomous Austrian Rus', thus uniting all Rusin lands of Austria: Galichina, Bukovina, and Subcarpathian (Ugorskaya (Hungarian)) Rus'.

Attempts were made to attain Rusins' own statehood after World War I.

The defeat of Austria-Hungary in WWI led to the collapse of the empire. In October 1918, the State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia), Polish and Czechoslovak Republics were established. Although Emperor Charles (Karl) issued a Manifesto on October 16, in which he announced the intention to transform the Habsburg monarchy into a federal state, it was too late. Earlier, in August 1917,

Charles decided to change the names of ethnic Ruthenians, Rusyns / Rusins (Ruthenen) to Ukrainians (Ukrainer).

The Russian (Rusin) movement at that time was weakened by Austro-Hungarian reprisals. At the outbreak of war, scores of thousands of Russian Galicians and Bukovinians were sent to Europe's first concentration camps established by Austro-Hungarians: Talerhof and Gnas in Styria, Terezin in Northern Czechia, Gmind in Upper Austria et al. Not less than 20,000 people were imprisoned in Talerhof alone, to say nothing of the other camps. According to some estimates, during WWI Austro-Hungarian authorities exterminated at least 60,000 Rusins including old people, men, women and children, who were subjects of Austri-Hungary.

Eastern Galicia was affected by the war more severely than any other regions of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. In 1914 – 1918, the population of Galicia was reduced by 300,000 people at the expense of excess of death rate over birth rate and the main decrease in the population occurred in its Eastern part. The decline in the birth rate was facilitated by the fact that in Austria-Hungary the proportion of mobilized men was 55.5%. The growth of epidemic diseases also contributed to the population decline. The 1918 influenza pandemic that struck Eastern Galicia killed more people than WWI. 422,000 people had to leave the region due to the military actions in this territory and reprisals by the Austro-Hungarian authorities. In Russia, according to some reports, about 200,000 Galicians became refugees during the war.

The Rusins in Eastern Galicia suffered the largest population loss. It led to a shift in the numerical balance among the ethnic groups in the region. By October, 1918, on the Italian, Serbian, and Albanian fronts, there were 30 regiments out of 34 regiments of the Austro-Hungarian Army, where the Rusins made up the majority; four regiments were in Little Russia. As the majority of the Rusins fought on the Italian front, more than 100,000 of them remained in captivity in Italy after the collapse of Austria-Hungary.

Nevertheless, the Galician Rusins made some attempts to attain their statehood.

In Western Galicia, Rusin villages established the Comanche Republic (known as the Eastern Lemko-Rusin Republic consisting of 30 villages) in the valley of the Oslava river near the town of Comanche in November, 1918 [Gmina Komancza (countryside district), Powiat Sanocki (Sanok County, Subcarpathian Voivodeship)]. The Lemko-Rusin Republic announced their decision to join the West Ukrainian People's Republic. The Lemko-Rusin Republic lasted two months and

fell to the onslaught of Polish troops at the end of January, 1919. In Florynka (nowadays a village in Poland in Gmina Grybów in the Nowy Sącz County, Malopolska Voivodeship) on December 5, 1918 500 delegates from 130 villages elected the Executive Committee of Lemkovyna which proclaimed the Ruthenian (Rusin) National Republic of Lemkos also known as the Western Lemko Republic. Its aim was unifying all the Rusins and creating one state – Carpathian Rus', followed by its subsequent becoming an integral part of Russia. Due to the impossibility of joining Russia, the alternative was to become an autonomous Rusin province in Chechoslovakia. In March 1920, the Lemko-Rusin Republic was occupied by the Polish troops.

On October 18 – 19, 1918, the Ukrainian National (People's) Rada was formed in Lvov by the Ukrainian deputies of two chambers of the Austrian Parliament, of the Galician and Bukovinian sejms, and by the representatives of several Ukrainian parties of Galichina and Bukovina such as the National Democratic Party, the Ukrainian Radical Party, the Ukrainian Social Democraric Party and the Peasant Radical Party; each party was represented by three members of the parties' leadership.

On November 1, 1918, the Polish Liquidation Committee created on October 28, 1918, with its seat in Krakow, was to arrive in Lvov. Its aim was to ensure the transfer of Eastern Galicia from the Austrian Governor to Poland. On November 1, the Ukrainian National Rada supported by the Sich Riflemen took power in Lvov, in a number of other cities and then throughout Eastern Galicia.

Realizing that it was impossible to rescue the city from the attack and seizure by the superior enemy forces, Galician military units left the city on the night of 21/22 November 1918, to avoid encirclement. Most members of the Ukrainian National Rada and the members of the Secretariat of State left the city with them. After the Poles had taken over the city they staged a three-day Jewish pogrom as revenge on the Jewish population for their taking a neutral stance.

Yaroslav passed into the hands of the Poles on November 1, Peremyszl changed hands on November 1.

The West Ukrainian People's Republic was proclaimed on November 13, 1918. Its armed forces, the Ukrainian Galician Army (UGA), were founded on the basis of several reserve battalions of the former Austrian Army.

The offensive of the regular Polish forces began in the north and west, Romanian troops were advancing in the South. The Romanian troops entered Chernovtsy on November 11 and occupied, against the will of the population, the entire Northern Bukovina region. On December 31, the Romanian King signed the Act of incorporation of

Bukovina into Romania. The occupation regime was established in the region.

The Government of the West Ukrainian People's Republic moved to Ternopol. In late December, the city of Stanislav (now Ivano-Frankovsk) became the new seat of the West Ukrainian People's Republic Government. It controlled 40 powiats (districts) in Eastern Galicia.

After the additional elections to the National Rada in late November, its size increased up to 150 people because of new delegates elected in powiats (districts) and towns. E. Petrushevich was elected president of the National Rada. On January 3, the Rada, counting on "Great Ukraine" to support them, approved a preliminary agreement on the unification with the Ukrainian People's Republic (Act Zluky). A preliminary agreement was signed in Fastov on December 1, 1918, by the representatives of the ZUNR (the West Ukrainian People's Republic or WUPR) and of the UNR Directorate (the Directorate of the Ukrainian People's Republic or UPR).

On 22 January 1919, the Directorate proclaimed the Unification Act on the Sofia Square in Kiev. According to it, ZUNR (WUPR) became an autonomous western region of the Ukrainian National Republic. However, it was agreed that before the elections to the Constituent Assembly of the unified republic, the Ukrainian National Rada should exercise the legislative power throughout the territory of the former West-Ukrainian Republic.

In November and December, mobilization was declared for the Rusin population within the age range of 18 to 35. Up to 100,000 people were drafted before the end of December. Only 40,000 of them were combat-ready. A number of commanders were Germans, former officers of the Austro-Hungarian Army. ZUNR(WUPR) also invited ex-Tsarist officers.

At the same time, in 1918 – 1919, about 15 million people lived in the territory of the Russian and Austrian parts of Poland (excluding the German possessions – the western part of Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) with Poznan). During WWI up to 3.4 million Poles served in the armies of different countries. Their combat losses amounted to 390,000 people. In August, Poland had an army of 500,000 soldiers (200,000 of them battle-ready). Poland was assisted by France and other Entente countries. France equipped General J. Haller's Army (three corps) that was 100,000 men strong and L. Zeligowski's Division which arrived in Poland via Bessarabia from Odessa occupied by the French.

Since April 1919, after the arrival of Haller's Army to Poland, General P. Henrys' Mission had been working there settling the issues of providing the Polish army with weapons and equipment.

On February 17, the Galician Army launched the Vovchuhi/Volchuki (a village in Lvov County) operation from where the main attack was directed with the objective of liberating Lvov.

Offensive fighting was going on along the front with the frontline of 300 km. On October 18, the army reached the railway lines, thus interrupting railway and telephone communications between Lvov and Peremyshl (now Przemyśl). The same day, France requested to let the train through. On board the train there was the Interallied Mission of the Entente, headed by the French General J. Barthélemy authorized by the Paris Peace Conference. On their train Barthélemy brought 14,000 rifles and ammunition through to Lvov. Many historians believe that the Poles enjoyed the General's attention and goodwill because his wife descended from the Polish szlachta nobility.

On February 22, the Mission categorically demanded an immediate ceasefire of the Galician Army Command. The requirement was fulfilled on February 25. The next day Polish-Galician peace talks began. The purpose of Barthélemy's Mission was the conclusion of the armistice (necessary for joining forces against Soviet Russia) and then the peace treaty between Poland and ZUNR (WUPR). On February 28, the Mission presented its truce draft. In accordance with the demarcation line (later called Barthélemy line), Lvov and the oil fields of Eastern Galicia (1/3 of the territory) were left to Poland.

On February 27, the UNR (Ukrainian Peoples' Republic) Army Commander S. Petliura took part in the negotiations. He was ready to accept the demands of Barthélemy's Mission in exchange for the recognition of the UNR and ZUNR (WUPR). He demanded the military assistance of the Galician Army to fight the Bolshevik troops; the assistance was denied.

By March 18, the Poles had managed to raise the blockade of Lvov after reconquering the railway line. The unsuccessful operation shattered the morale of the Galician Army while the Polish Army recaptured the initiative at the front.

The Entente feared that the Galician Army could enter into an alliance with the Red army which had broken through to the Zbruch river. That is why the Allies sent to Poland General J. Haller's Army formed in France. His army immediately joined the fight against the Galician troops notwithstanding the Entente representatives' statements that Haller's Army would not struggle against the Galicians and would only fight the Bolsheviks. The Polish government headed by J. Pilsudski was authorized by Paris for military occupation of entire Eastern Galicia, promising to provide "self-determination" in future.

On April 30, Haller's Army entered Lvov. It numbered 50,000 men,

200 cannons and 900 machine guns. 100,000 Poles fought at the Galician battlefield. The Galician Army numbered 37,000 men.

On May 14, the Polish Army broke the front. On May 24, the Romanian Army launched an offensive on Pokkutia and after capturing Kolomyia, approached Stanislav. On June 1, the Poles took control of Ternopol. After heavy fighting against overwhelming odds the Galician Army was flung back to the Zbruch river.

On June 7, the Galician Army went on the offensive. Despite the small size of the army (only 25,000 combat-ready soldiers) the Galician troops forced the enemy to retreat along the entire frontline. The success of the army rekindled the enthusiasm of the population. About 90,000 volunteers joined the army, but due to shortage of weapons just 15,000 men were enlisted. After Haller's Army had returned to the front, the Polish Army launched a counteroffensive on June 28, recaptured Ternopol and approached the Zbruch river.

On June 25, 1919, influenced by Poles, "the Council of Ten" recognized the Poland's right to the occupation of the entire Eastern Galicia under the slogan of fighting Bolshevism. "The Council of Ten" consisted of heads of governments and secretaries of state/foreign ministers of five major victorious countries: Great Britain, France, the USA, Italy and Japan. Poland was granted a provisional mandate to govern the territory provided that the rights of the population were ensured and sufficient autonomy guaranteed.

The movement of the UGA (Ukrainian Galician Army) and Dictator Petrushevskiy to the territory of Malorossiya (Little Russia) did not lead to a complete unification with the Ukrainian Directorate despite the fact that Greater Ukraine was proclaimed as early as in January 1919. Too great were the differences between the parties, as N. Polonska-Vasilenko believed. The ZUNR (WUPR) government was non-partisan and anti-socialist. It considered its immediate task to continue struggle with Poland and was ready for an alliance with Denikin.

The directorate was headed by Social Democrats, who were willing to come to an agreement with the Bolsheviks on the struggle against Denikin's Volunteer Army. Their relations influenced the situation very much too: Petliura and the entire leadership of the UPR (Ukrainian People's Republic) thought that E. Petrushevich had been elected dictator in an illegitimate and undemocratic manner. Petrushevich and all members of the ZUNR (WUPR) Government, in their turn, believed that appointing Petliura the commander-in-chief of the army would harm the cause.

After the negotiations of the Ukrainian People's Republic and Poland had started, the ZUNR (WUPR) official diplomatic delegation notified

the UPR Embassy and the Polish Government on December 4, 1919, of the denunciation of the Unification Act ("Act Zluky") by the ZUNR (WUPR) Government headed by E. Petrusovich. It was a protest against Petliura's secret negotiations with Poland.

On November 6, 1919, at the time when Denikin's Army suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of the Bolsheviks, the Commander of the Galician Army General M. Tarnavsky signed an agreement with Denikin. The army came under the command of the joint forces of South Russia, and the Galician Government was protected by the Russian Volunteer Army and transferred to Odessa. In accordance with the agreement, the Galician Army retained its posture and internal regulations and could not be used against Petliura's troops. According to A. I. Denikin's testimony, "It retained the discipline and absolute loyalty till the end. But they could not restore the combat capability within that short period of time allowed by the situation, the Army having lost its morale and fitness, being in want of everything, with up to ten thousand of people infected with typhoid fever".

The military history of the Galician Army showed that the majority of its officers and soldiers supported the idea of Russian irredentism. Despite the alliance with S. Petliura's Directorate, the Galician Army Command considered first Denikin and then Soviet regime officials as possible representatives of the legitimate Soviet authorities. This is confirmed by the withdrawal of troops from Kiev when the Volunteer Army regiments approached the city, the entry into the negotiations with the White Army Command and going over to its side, joining the Soviet troops after the defeat of the Volunteer Army, and the participation in the Soviet-Polish war.

Keywords

Rusins, Galicia, Austro-Hungary, Russia, Little Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Civil War, Soviet-Polish war.