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## РУСИНСКИЙ ВОПРОС В ИСТОРИЧЕСКОМ КОНТЕКСТЕ СЛОВАЦКО-УКРАИНСКИХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ

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### **Авторское резюме**

Статья посвящена рассмотрению наиболее важных исторических аспектов русинского вопроса в контексте словацко-украинских отношений. Авторы анализируют основные моменты словацко-русинских отношений в прошлом, в том числе становление русинов как национального меньшинства в современной Словакии. Кроме того, рассмотрена и политическая сторона русинского аспекта словацко-украинских отношений с точки зрения того, что, в отличие от Словакии, Украина после приобретения ею независимости в 1992 г. не признала русинов в качестве отдельного национального меньшинства. Разницу подходов Украины и Словакии к русинскому меньшинству, проживающему в их пограничной зоне после смены режима на рубеже 1980-х и 1990-х гг., можно объяснить прежде всего специфическим и в основном положительным историческим опытом проживания словаков с русинами, с которыми они имели общее прошлое в различных государственных образованиях до 1947 г.

**Ключевые слова:** русинский вопрос, исторический контекст, политический аспект, русины в Словакии, словацко-украинские отношения.

# THE RUSYN QUESTION IN THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE SLOVAK-UKRAINIAN RELATIONS

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## Abstract

This article aims to explore the most important historical aspects of the Rusyn question in the context of Slovak-Ukrainian relations. It maps major points of Slovak-Rusyn relations in the past, including development of Rusyn minority in modern Slovakia. In addition, it analyses political dimension of Rusyn question in Slovak-Ukrainian relations brought by the fact that unlike Slovakia Ukraine did not recognize Rusyns as a separate national minority after it became independent state in 1992. Authors of this article argue that different approaches of Ukraine and Slovakia towards Rusyn minority living in their borderland after the regime change at the turn of 1980s and 1990s could be explained first of all by specific and mostly positive historical experience of Slovaks with Rusyns with whom they shared common past in the same state formations until 1947.

**Keywords:** Rusyn question, historical context, political dimension, Rusyns in Slovakia, Slovak-Ukrainian relations.

## Introduction

The Rusyn question frames the Slovak-Ukrainian minority agenda since both Slovakia and Ukraine became independent states after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union at the turn of 1980s and 1990s.

In Slovakia it is generally recognized that people living mostly in the north-eastern part of the country on borders with Ukraine and Poland identify themselves as Rusyns whereas part of them shares also Ukrainian national identity. All Slovak citizens have a constitutional right to free expression of religious and national identity. This is why

the Slovak government and respective minority legislation treats Rusyns and Ukrainians living in Slovakia as members of two different national minorities with all minority rights granted by the Slovak legislation. However, Rusyns were not officially recognized as a national minority in neighbouring Ukraine. They were treated as a Ukrainian ethnic group with some distinctive regional, cultural, and linguistic characteristics. The different official treatment and legal status of Rusyns in Slovakia and Ukraine became a point of certain misunderstanding in Slovak-Ukrainian relations, especially in the 1990s.

Ukrainian official policy concerning Rusyns has been influenced by fears of Rusyn political separatism in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine (the former Subcarpathian Rus' within inter-war Czechoslovakia). The Association of Subcarpathian Rusyns in Ukraine was established in 1990 and has formulated two main demands to the Ukrainian government – to recognize Rusyns as an original national minority and to provide territorial autonomy for the Transcarpathian Region under its historical name – Subcarpathian Rus'. The Ukrainian government rejected these claims. However, there are some changes in Ukrainian approach towards Rusyns living in Ukraine in the recent years. The Ukrainian language law adopted in 2010 lists Rusyn language as one of the regional languages that might be used on regional scale upon decision of respective regional authorities. Nevertheless, a sort of "non-recognition" approach of Ukraine towards Rusyns helps to understand the sensitivity of the Rusyn question in Slovak-Ukrainian relations caused by disparate official treatment and legal minority status of Rusyns living on both sides of the Slovak-Ukrainian border.

In political and diplomatic terms, when it comes to Slovak-Ukrainian relations it may be possible to deal with the status of Slovak minority in Ukraine without taking into account the Rusyn question. However, it is impossible to neglect it if one takes into consideration the fact that the Rusyn question has the potential to influence the political status of the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine (neighbouring region of Slovakia). In addition, 94 per cent of the total number of ethnic Slovaks in Ukraine (7,900 persons following the last Soviet census in 1989) live in the Transcarpathian Region. However, it is certainly impossible to deal with the status of the Ukrainian minority in Slovakia without taking into account the Rusyn question.

The partition of the former Ukrainian minority in Slovakia into two groups with different national identifications (Rusyn and Ukrainian) – even if there is a general understanding in Slovakia that those who identify themselves as Rusyns or Ukrainians are of the same ethnic

origin – after the breakdown of the communist regime became a new phenomenon, a process which began after World War II, but it became an unambiguous reality in the 1990s. Trying to understand what has happened in this respect over the last two decades, there is a need to come back to historical conditions and developments of Rusyns in Slovakia before and also after World War II.

This article aims to explore the most important historical aspects of the Rusyn question in the context of Slovak-Ukrainian relations with the aim to identify its political dimension in given relations. In this article we argue that a different approach of Slovakia towards Rusyn minority by contrast to Ukraine after the regime change at the turn of 1980s and 1990s could be explained by specific and mostly positive historical experience of Slovaks sharing with Rusyns common past in the same state formations until 1947 when Subcarpathian Region of Czechoslovakia was acceded to the Soviet Union under the name of Transcarpathian Region.

### **Historical perception of Rusyns in Slovakia**

Historical development of the Ukrainian lands around Kiev and Dnipro River was perceived by Slovaks as something «behind the Carpathian Mountains» which bore no direct consequence for their own history. Quite the opposite is true for the present Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine that was historically seen by Slovaks as Subcarpathian Rus or "Rusinsko"(Ruthenia) on "our side of Carpathian Mountains". Slovaks have shared with Rusyns (Rusnaks) living on the southern side of the Carpathian mountains a common fate for more than thousand years in the same state formations – the Kingdom of Hungary, the Habsburg monarchy, Austro-Hungary and the first Czechoslovak Republic. The "Upper lands" ("Felvidek" in Hungarian) was a common designation used in Hungary for the territories of Slovakia and Ruthenia (Magocsi, Pop 2002).

Originally, the terms Rusyn / Rusnak were used to designate adherents of Eastern Christianity (Orthodox or later also Greek Catholic), since Rus' was the name of the inhabitants and territory of a large medieval state with its centre in Kiev. Later, all Eastern Slavs used the terms for self-identification until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, including Russians, Belarusians and Ukrainians. The formation of separate Eastern Slavic nations with separate original ethnic identities started after the disintegration of the Kiev Rus' in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and was completed in the case of Ukraine in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rusyns living on southern side of the Carpathian Mountains (who were also Eastern Slavs) were excluded from the main stream of Ukrainian history and nation building (Pop, Halas

1993). They retained an old Slavic "Rusyn" identity. Most of them were Orthodox until the year 1646, when the Uzhgorod Union was accepted by part of the Orthodox clergy. At this point, the Uniate church, i.e. an Eastern Christian Church united with Rome, was created. The Uniates were allowed to retain the Eastern rite and traditions, but had to recognize the Pope instead of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople as the ultimate head of their church. Hence from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Rusyns were either Orthodox or Uniates. In 1772, the Uniates were renamed Greek Catholics (known also as Byzantine Catholics) (Pop 2011).

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Rusyn leaders have argued about their national identity. Some have felt Rusyns to be a branch of Russians, others a branch of Ukrainians, still others that they form a distinct Slavic nationality. Each orientation has used a different language, whether Russian, Ukrainian, or Rusyn, as a means to identify themselves. The leaders of the first revival elite of Rusyns living in the Hungarian part of Austro-Hungary felt that Rusyns were a branch of Russians (Adolf Dobriansky) and that their literary language should be Russian (Alexander Dukhnovych). Many representatives of the Greek Catholic clergy supported a Rusynophile orientation. Ukrainophile and Russophile tendencies were strengthened by the large influx of white Russian and Ukrainian emigrants to Czechoslovakia after World War I (Magocsi 1978; Magocsi 1999).

The attitude of the communist parties in Eastern Europe after World War II towards the Rusyn question was determined in 1924, when the Fifth congress of the Comintern in Moscow passed a resolution on the Ukrainian question. According to this, Rusyns were simply Ukrainians and the communist parties of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania had to support their unification with the Ukrainian Soviet Republic in the Soviet Union (Bajcura 1967: 55 – 58). In the 1950s, the Communist party of Czechoslovakia started a process of Ukrainization in education and culture, prohibiting the Greek Catholic Church. Similar processes took place in Poland and Romania. Only after the collapse of communism after 1989, the Rusyn movement has been revived. But the process of ethnic self-identification of Rusyns is still not completed. To this day, there are two main national orientations among Rusyns in Slovakia, but also in Ukraine, Poland, etc. – Rusyn and Ukrainian (Gajdoš et al. 1999).

### **Slovak and Rusyn revival elites: common interests and controversies**

Leaders of the Rusyn revival elite of the 19<sup>th</sup> century shared the same goals of other Slavic nations in the monarchy as to national rights and political autonomy. There are many examples of coordinated activities

between the Rusyn and Slovak revival elite in the protection of common interests, including military actions against the Hungarian revolution in 1840s. Rusyn and Slovak members of the Hungarian parliament backed each other's interests in their proclamations and speeches. A Slovak delegation presented the political program of Uhro-Rusyns at the Slavic congress held in Prague in June 1848. On the other side, Rusyn leader Alexander Dobriansky was one of the founders of the Slovak Matica, etc (Z dejín 1957)<sup>1</sup>. The alliance between the Slovak and Rusyn national elites was strong until the end of World War I. This has changed under the new political conditions following the creation of the first Czechoslovak Republic in 1918.

Following the end of World War I, the territory of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus' became part of the new Czechoslovak Republic. In May 1919, the Central National Rusyn Council in Uzhgorod voted for union with Czechoslovakia. In the treaty of St. Germain, the Paris Peace Conference recognized the union with Czechoslovakia on the understanding that Rusyns would be given autonomy. Instead, the issue of Rusyn autonomy became a source of discontent as the Czechoslovak constitution of 1920 limited the autonomy provisions, referring to the unity of the new state (Kadlec 1920; Krofta 1935).

Other complaints included the definition of the border between Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus'. The territorial commission at the Paris conference put a preliminary demarcation line between Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus' within Czechoslovakia along the river Uh with the recommendation that Slovak and Rusyn representations would have to agree to a potential annex of north-eastern Slovakia inhabited by Rusyns to Subcarpathian Rus'. Thus some 150,000 Rusyns were left in Slovakia. The first governor of Subcarpathian Rus' and leader of American Rusyns Gregory Zhatkovich resigned from his post in 1921. The reason was the failure of the Czechoslovak government to fully accord to Subcarpathian Rus' autonomy rights and to settle the boundary problem with Slovakia (Zatkovic 1921). According to the constitutional law passed by the Czechoslovak parliament in July 1927, the country was divided into four provinces: the Czech lands, Moravia, Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus'. Thus, the original demarcation line between Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus' became a fixed administrative boundary between two Czechoslovak provinces.

In the 1930s, another source of conflict between Slovak and Rusyn politicians emerged. This was linked to different strategies for finding external support for their autonomy aspirations. While the clerical Slovak People's Party was trying to obtain support from Germany, the main autonomous forces in the then Subcarpathian Rus' orientated

themselves towards Hungary (the Autonomous Agricultural Union led by Andrey Brody) and Poland (the fascist Rusyn National and Autonomous Party led by Stepan Fencik) (Kozminski 1970). For its part, the Slovak pro-autonomy elite perceived the growing Hungarian influence in Subcarpathian Rus' as dangerous for Slovak national interests. Thus, contrary to the revival period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Slovak and Rusyn elites were no longer able to find a language of common interest after World War I (Švorc 1995).

### **In the different states after World War II**

When Czechoslovakia was transformed into a federal state after the Munich treaty in October 1938, both Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus' received full self-governing status. Before Hitler Germany started war against Poland in 1939, it decided to eliminate Czechoslovakia. Before the German invasion of Czech lands on 15th March 1939, Hitler negotiated with the Slovak People's Party (led by Jozef Tiso) and Hungary (Miklos Horthy) to prepare the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. On March 14, the Slovak Diet convened and unanimously declared Slovak independence (Kirschbaum 1995). On March 15, under President Augustin Voloshyn (the then PM of Subcarpathian Rus') who was Ukrainophile in his orientation, Subcarpathian Rus' declared independence under the name of the Carpathian Ukraine. When Nazi Germany took Prague, Hungarian troops invaded and occupied Carpatho-Ukraine. The invasion encountered resistance, which the Hungarian army crushed (Vehesh, Zadorozhny 1993). As Hungarian troops crossed the borders between the former Subcarpathian Rus' and Slovakia, military conflicts broke out between Slovakia and Hungary, although both the Tiso and Horthy regimes were allied with Nazi Germany. The conflict only ended after pressure from the German side and Hitler's personal intervention (Deák 1991).

Some 30,000 Rusyns fled to the Soviet Union from Subcarpathian Rus' to escape Hungarian occupation. Soviet authorities, eager to maintain good relations with Germany at the time of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact, promptly arrested them and sent them to labor camps. Later, the majority of soldiers in the Czechoslovak brigade formed in the Soviet Union after the agreement between the Czechoslovak government in London and Moscow in 1943, were Rusyns coming from Subcarpathian Rus'. Of 15,000 soldiers in the brigade led by General Ludvik Svoboda in 1943, 11,000 were Rusyns (Potichnyj 1986).

In October 1944, the Soviet army took Subcarpathian Rus'. Despite an agreement signed in May 1944 between the Czechoslovak and Soviet governments stipulating that all Czechoslovak territory liberated by

the Soviet army would be placed under Czechoslovak civilian control, Soviet activities led much of the local population to believe that Soviet annexation was imminent. The Czechoslovak government was pressed to cede Subcarpathian Rus'. The treaty ceding Subcarpathian Rus' to the Soviet Union was signed in June 1945. Subcarpathian Rus' lost its self-governing status in 1946 and became a region of Soviet Ukraine with the new official name of Transcarpathian Region (Shandor 1993).

There had been no state border dividing Slovaks and Subcarpathian Rusyns for long centuries up to 1927, when it became an administrative boundary between Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus' in inter-war Czechoslovakia. After World War II, the same line became a very tightly controlled state border between the Soviet Union and post-war Czechoslovakia. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia in the early 1990s, this boundary became the state border between Ukraine and Slovakia. And finally, after Slovakia's accession to the European Union in 2004 it became the external Schengen border of the EU.

### **Rusyns after 1989: revival and political dimension**

The breakdown of the communist system in Czechoslovakia has allowed the free ethnic identification of people living there. Rusyns got chance for the first time from 1930's to announce their ethnic identity. In the time of socialist Czechoslovakia they could be registered as Ukrainians only. According to the 1991 census, 16,937 people (living mainly in north-eastern Slovakia) have indicated their ethnicity as Rusyn, and 13,847 people as Ukrainian, while around 50,000 people have indicated their mother language as Rusyn (Paukovič 1994). A new organization with name "Rusyn Renaissance" (Rusinska obroda) representing the minority interests of Rusyns in Slovakia has been established. Thus, the former Ukrainian minority was divided into two groups: one with "Ukrainian identity" and the second one with "Rusyn identity" (i.e., emphasizing a separate Slavic nation that is not a part of Ukrainian nation).

The newly born Rusyn organizations have emerged not only in Slovakia, but in the Transcarpathian Region of the Ukraine, Poland, Romania and Hungary as well (previously, they existed only in former Yugoslavia, Canada, USA etc.). All they rejected the so-called "Ukrainian national identity", which they believed was imposed by communist parties and Ukrainian nationalists during the 1950 as they emphasized (Rusini 1997). In the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine there has been established the Association of Subcarpathian Rusyns (henceforth ASR)

that has formulated its demands to the Ukrainian government – to recognize the Rusyns as an original national minority and provide territorial autonomy for the Transcarpathian Region under its historical name – Subcarpathian Rus’.

The ASR was established on 17 February 1990. On 29 March 1990, it issued a Declaration on Returning Statute of Autonomy Republic for Transcarpathian Region of the Ukraine, in which they questioned all legal acts passed by Supreme Councils both of Soviet Union and Ukrainian Soviet Republic in 1945–1946. They consider the Czechoslovak act of October 1938 as the only legal one, which established Autonomy of Subcarpathian Rus’ within in the framework of Czechoslovakia. Subcarpathian Rus’ was annexed to the Soviet Union on the basis of treaty signed between the governments of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union on 29 June 1945 (Programme Statement 1993).

The first article of the treaty states: "Transcarpathian Ukraine (whose name according to the Czechoslovak constitution is Subcarpathian Rus’), which became a part of the Czechoslovakia on the base of treaty concluded in Saint-Germain-en-Laye on 10 September 1919, taking the wish of people living there as well as in accordance with friendly agreement of negotiating sides, is uniting... with Soviet Ukraine" (Belousov 1953: 147). ASR’ representatives pointed out that Subcarpathian Rus’ has been attached to the Soviet Union as a former entire component part of Czechoslovakia including its autonomous statute and thus, Soviet organs had no legal right to abolish it. Furthermore, ASR justified its claims using the results of the referendum that took place in Transcarpathian Region in December 1991. In that referendum 78 per cent of participants voted for an autonomous statute for the region in framework of the Ukraine (Programme Statement 1993).

Because the government, president and parliament of Ukraine have ignored the results of the December 1991 referendum, on 15 May 1993 the ASR established a "provisional government that has been abolished by Stalin with aim to renew a statehood of the Subcarpathian Rus’". The Prime Minister of this transitional government, Professor Ivan Turyanitsya once said: "The independence of the Subcarpathian Rus’ will be declared by Regional Council (parliament of the region – author). This new state power will ask the Commonwealth of Independent States for regular membership"<sup>2</sup>.

The Ukrainian government rejected these claims, accusing the Rusyn movement of political separatism supported from Moscow (Panchuk 1995). It needs to be underlined that the Russian political representatives did not try to oppose very hard this Ukrainian worrying about the Rusyn question. Moreover, former Chairman of the Russian State Duma

Committee on CIS Affairs Konstantin Zatulin in January 1995 announced that "Russia has some scenarios concerning the Ukraine when it will not be able to exist as an independent state. One of them supposes an existence of an independent state on a Rusyn ethnic basis within the borders of contemporary Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine, with full Russian support of such state"<sup>3</sup>.

Ukrainian government addressed its Slovak counterpart in 1994 with the proposition to establish a common Committee on Minority Issues. Its main interest was to influence the Slovak government to reduce its support to Rusyn minority in Slovakia because of its indirect effects on increasing Rusyn separatism in Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine. During the first visit of Ukrainian Minister of Foreign Affairs Anatolij Zlenko to Bratislava in February 1994, he commented that: "...separatism is a fear. I know that similar problems exist in Slovakia too. Therefore, my opinion is that a co-operation and co-ordination of our countries in this field with the aim to neutralize those processes would help us to create the basis for a fruitful relations between Ukraine and Slovakia and the same time it would strengthen the stability in the whole of region"<sup>4</sup>.

The so-called "Rusyn question" has been a serious issue in Slovak-Ukrainian relations especially in the 1990s. Anyway, none Slovak government ever changed its position towards Rusyns as a separate national minority referring to constitutional right of Slovak citizens to freely identify their ethnic identity, while Ukraine did not.

### **Divided Minority in Slovakia: Rusyns and Ukrainians**

According to the Czechoslovak census of 1991, the number of ethnic Rusyns and Ukrainians living in Slovakia was 30,784 (0,6 per cent of total population of Slovakia) of whom 56 % are registered as Rusyns and 44 % as Ukrainians (Vývoj 1997). The division of the former Ukrainian minority into two groups with different national self-identification became a matter of fact in the early 1990s. While Rusyn leaders always had different national orientations (Russophile, Ukrainophile and Rusynophile) in the historical past, their disputes never attracted the interest of ordinary people who identified themselves as Rusyns, Rusnaks, Carpathian Rusyns, Subcarpathian Rusyns, Uhro-Rusyns, etc. In Austro-Hungarian and Czechoslovak censuses before World War II, they were registered as Rusyns with different adjectives as mentioned above. Czechoslovak statistics after World War II refer to them as Ukrainians<sup>5</sup>. Even today, nobody questions the fact that Rusyns and Ukrainians in Slovakia are people of the same ethnic origin despite their different national self-identification (Bačová, Kusá 1997; Gajdoš, Konečný 1997).

The official data from Czechoslovak censuses from the period after World War I until 1989 reveal a remarkable process of assimilation among the Rusyn (Ukrainian) minority in Slovakia. In 1921, 88,970 people registered themselves as Rusyns<sup>6</sup>. This rate reached 97,783 (Rusyns) in 1930 and then gradually decreases to 35,435 in 1950 (Ukrainians), 42,238 (Ukrainians) in 1961, 39,260 (Ukrainians) in 1970 and to 30,784 (Rusyns and Ukrainians) in 1991. In the census of 1991, around 50,000 people in Slovakia still indicated that their mother tongue was Rusyn (Gajdoš, Konečný 1997: 83). According to research carried out by the Institute of Social Sciences (Kosice) in 1990, Rusyns think themselves that there are two main factors which supported assimilation after World War II: the migration of the rural Rusyn population to Slovak cities and the official introduction of the Ukrainian national orientation in 1950s (Vzťahy 1990: 27).

The last two decades prove a certain renaissance of Rusyn minority in Slovakia. In the 2001 census 24,201 residents of Slovakia identified their national identity as Rusyn and 54,907 claimed Rusyn as their mother tongue. In the 2011 census the number of Slovak residents who identified themselves as Rusyns was 33,482 and the number of those who declared Rusyn as their mother tongue was 55,469.

**Number of residents of the Slovak Republic who declared their Rusyn nationality, Rusyn language as a mother tongue, Orthodox and Greek-Catholic confessions following the censuses of the Slovak population in 1991, 2001 and 2011**

Number of residents of the Slovak Republic	1991	2001	2011
Rusyn nationality	17 197	24 201	33 482
Rusyn as mother tongue	49 099	54 907	55 469
Orthodox believers	34 376	50 363	49 133
Greek-Catholic believers	178 733	219 831	206 871

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Following the last population census in 2011 Rusyns became the third largest national minority in Slovakia after Hungarians (458,467) and Roma (105,738). For the first time since 1993 the number of Rusyns in Slovakia became higher than the number of Czechs (30,367). Rusyns in the 2011 census have evidenced the largest percentage growth among all national minorities living in Slovakia against the 2001 census – in 38 % (in 96 % if compared with the data from the 1991 census). Together with Rusyns the percentage growth has been evidenced only in case of Russians (25 %), Roma and Poles (identically by 18 %) and Serbs (16 %). All other national minorities in Slovakia evidenced the

decline – Ukrainians (31 %), Germans (13 %) and Bulgarians (11 %) (Rundesová 2012).

The sort of renaissance of Rusyn minority in Slovakia within the last two decades could be explained by the following two main factors: first, democratic conditions in Slovakia that allow for free identification of national and confessional identities of Slovak citizens, and second, successful activities of the Rusyn organizations established at the beginning of 1990s (Duleba 2013). Nevertheless, the data on the number of believers of the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic confessions in Slovakia indicate a strong process of historical assimilation of Rusyns.

### Divided religions

While Slovaks were historically Catholic or Protestant, Rusyns were mainly Orthodox and, from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, also Greek-Catholic. According to the 1991 census, 178,733 persons indicated their religion as Greek-Catholic and 34,376 as Orthodox (Statistical Yearbook 1998: 526). Moreover, as the above table shows the number of the Orthodox and Greek-Catholic believers following the last 2011 census was 49,133 respectively 206,871. These figures are much higher than the number of people identifying themselves as having Rusyn or Ukrainian national identity.

The communist regime in Czechoslovakia followed the longstanding Russian and Soviet practice of opposing the Uniate Church (linked to Catholic Rome) in favour of the orthodox clergy. In 1950s, the Greek-Catholic Church was banned while the Orthodox Church took over its property and parishes. Uniate clergymen were imprisoned or sent into exile. Uniate believers responded with various forms of resistance, ranging from leaving churches whenever an orthodox priest arrived to holding services among themselves. In the late 1960s, following seizures of churches by Uniates, the government promised a solution. The Greek-catholic church was officially recognized in 1968, but the poverty disputes between the Uniate and Orthodox churches were left unsettled (Coranič 2009). The problem flared up again after the 1989 revolution, when Greek-Catholics began seizing churches by force, resulting in a series of violent acts throughout north-eastern Slovakia. Many Rusyn villages were divided into two hostile groups following different religious orientations.

The Slovak government faced up to the problem by arranging negotiations between representatives of both eparchies, which resulted in series of administrative measures. The first were the Act on the Settlement of Property Injustices Caused to Churches and Religious Societies (so-

called "Restitution Act") and a legal measure passed by the Presidium of the Slovak National Council On Defining Financial Relations Between the Greek Catholic and the Orthodox Churches (No. 211/1990 of the Legal Code) (Legal Status 1997).

As a result, the poverty seized by the Orthodox Church in the 1950s has been given back to the Greek Catholics, while both churches have agreed on a list of churches for common use until new orthodox churches will be built. The Slovak government has passed a financial program to support the construction of new orthodox churches. Thus, the problem was solved quite successfully by the mid-1990s and, today many Rusyn villages and cities have Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches. Nevertheless, the memory of acts of violence remains a part of common memory and mentally still divides Rusyns living in communities where both confessions are practiced.

It should be underlined that the religious division of Rusyns and Ukrainians does not correspond to their differences in national self-identification. Thus, many Rusyns who feel they are Rusyns are of both Orthodox and Greek-Catholic confession. The same is true for those who feel themselves to be Ukrainians. This is rather a positive factor, which helps to pacify tensions and conflicts in the Rusyn / Ukrainian minority.

### **Divided institutions**

The main institution allowed by the communist party to represent minority interests of Ukrainians in Slovakia after World War II was the Cultural Association of Ukrainian Workers (Kultúrny zväz ukrajinských pracujúcich – KZUP) set up in the early 1950s. After its last congress in 1990, the KZUP was dissolved and two separate new organizations were established: the Union of Rusyns-Ukrainians in Slovakia (Zväz Rusínov-Ukrajincov Slovenska – ZRUS) and the Rusyn Renaissance (Rusínska Obroda – RO). In terms of national self-identification, the ZRUS supports a Ukrainian and the RO a Rusyn orientation. The ZRUS continues to publish periodicals issued by the former KZUP (the bi-weekly "Nove Zhytta" and the two-monthly journal "Druzhno vpered") while the RO has started two new periodicals (the bi-weekly "Narodny novynky" and the two-monthly journal "Rusyn").

Both organizations compete with each other in persuading Rusyns / Ukrainians about their national identity and in attempts to win government support. Because some important minority institutions set up after World War II (i.e. the Museum of Rusyn-Ukrainian Culture in Svidník, the Theatre of Alexander Duchnovič in Prešov, the Ukrainian Branch of Slovak Radio in Prešov, the Department of Ukrainian Lan-

guage and Literature at Prešov University, etc.) are in the hold of former KZUP-representatives who have joined the ZRUS, the RO requires its own share of the former KZUP property or the establishment of parallel Rusyn institutions. These demands have been a constant source of conflict between the two organizations since the dissolution of the KZUP. For its part, the Slovak government has recognized the right of Rusyns to define themselves as ethnic Rusyns, but on the redistribution of KZUP property it has taken a different position, arguing that the two new organizations must find agreement between themselves (Gajdoš, Konečný 1997: 85).

In 1995, Rusyn Renaissance codified a Rusyn language as this was a main prerequisite for introducing Rusyn at primary schools as well as in state TV and radio minority broadcasting. The ZRUS protested the move, claiming that Rusyn is only a dialect of the Ukrainian language and that Rusyn nation does not exist. Leaders of the Rusyns argue that the Slovak government is subject to pressure by Kiev, which views efforts to recognize a separate Rusyn nationality as an anti-Ukrainian move. The Slovak government has refuted such allegations (Rusyns 1998). Anyway, with the start of academic year of 1998–1999 Rusyn parents could for the first time decide if they wish their children to be taught in Rusyn at primary schools, at least for some hours every week.

In summary, it must be underlined that the process of democratization after the velvet revolution of the late 1980s has revived the old historical "Rusyn question" which had been frozen under the communist regime. Formerly one Rusyn / Ukrainian minority living in northeastern Slovakia is now divided into two groups concerning national self-identification (Rusyn and Ukrainian) as well as their religious orientation (Orthodox and Greek Catholic). The organizations representing parts of the divided minority compete with each other in the fields of national orientation, culture, education and politics. Nevertheless, the censuses of 2001 and 2011 demonstrate that Rusyn identity becomes stronger in Slovakia.

### **Government attitudes and cooperation**

In 1994, a year after the signing of the basic treaty between Slovakia and Ukraine, the Ukrainian government proposed to set up a bilateral committee on minority issues. As mentioned earlier, according to the then Ukrainian foreign minister Anatolij Zlenko, the task of such a committee would be to prevent ethnic separatism; generally, Ukrainian-Slovak cooperation would strengthen stability in the whole region<sup>7</sup>. Behind this proposition, however, were fears on the Ukrainian side concerning possible "Rusyn separatism" in the Transcarpathian

Region. Slovak government has accepted proposition of its Ukrainian counterpart.

The bilateral Ukrainian-Slovak Committee for National Minorities, Education and Cultural Affairs held its first session in Kiev in February 1995. Both sides agreed that the committee would meet regularly at least once a year alternately in Ukraine and Slovakia. The Slovak side is chaired by the director general of the Department for Cooperation with Foreign Slovaks, Press and Humanitarian Relations of the Slovak Foreign Ministry, while Ukraine is represented by the first deputy Head of the State Committee for Minorities and Migration.

At the second meeting in Bratislava in 1996, both sides stressed that any demand for territorial, administrative or other forms of autonomy based on ethnic principles is unacceptable and refused any ethnic separatism which could destabilize the region of Central and Eastern Europe. They also demanded that representatives of the two minorities profess loyalty to the respective states in which they live (Protokol 1996). In other undiplomatic words, the Slovak side accepted Ukrainian fears of concerning so-called "Rusyn separatism" in Transcarpathia, while Ukraine accepted Slovak fears with regard to so-called "Hungarian separatism" in Slovakia. According to the Protocol of the Fourth Committee Session in 1998, both sides agreed to include representatives of two minority organizations – the Association of Rusyns-Ukrainians in Slovakia (ZRUS) and the Slovak Matica in Uzhgorod – in the Committee. As a result, majority of members of the former Ukrainian minority in Slovakia who feel they are Rusyns, are excluded from official Slovak-Ukrainian cooperation on minority issues (Šutaj, Olejník 1998).

Also, it should be underlined that the Slovak government does not question recognition of Rusyns as the national minority different to Ukrainian one in Slovakia with full rights and privileges in accordance with the Slovak minority legislation.

## Conclusions

Despite varying academic interpretations, the partition of the former Ukrainian minority in Slovakia into two groups with different national identities after the breakdown of communist regime is a political reality. National or religious identity cannot be imposed politically in democratic societies. Recognition of Rusyns as national minority by Ukraine is still far from being a matter of fact. Ukrainian official policy concerning the Rusyn question is pre-designed by fears of Rusyn political separatism in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine. The different official

treatment and also status of Rusyns in Slovakia and Ukraine became a point of misunderstanding in Slovak-Ukrainian relations.

Slovak-Ukrainian governmental cooperation in the field of minorities has become regular since 1995, when the bilateral Ukrainian-Slovak Committee for National Minorities was established. However, both governments agreed to exclude Rusyn organizations and institutions from this cooperation. Thus, Rusyns became a "stateless minority", which is an absolutely new phenomenon in the Carpathian Mountains area after World War II. People who feel themselves as Rusyns live also in neighboring regions of Poland, Romania and Hungary. They are recognized as a national minority in Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

The Slovak government respects the Ukrainian official attitude towards the Rusyn question in the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine but cannot implement such an attitude at home. This is a crucial point differentiating the Slovak and Ukrainian policies in this field and keeping the Rusyn question unresolved. Definitely, ignoring and neglecting the Rusyn question in Slovak-Ukrainian government communications is far from the best way to address the issue.

The Rusyn question cannot be viewed only in the Slovak-Ukrainian context. Rusyn organizations were established in Ukraine, and Slovakia, but also in Poland, Hungary and Romania. While the ridges of the Carpathian Mountains have become natural historical borders between Central-European states, people who identify themselves as Rusyns live on both sides of the Carpathian slopes, actually in five countries. This is a truly unique region in Europe, where the borders of five postcommunist countries come together. Moreover, regions of south-eastern Poland, north-eastern Hungary, north-western Romania, south-western Ukraine and north-eastern Slovakia are the poorest in their home countries. They are distant from capitals with more developed economic and social infrastructure. Taking into account these facts, it is understandable why the minority question in this border area is so important and why it should be viewed in an international, or at least Central-European, context.

## NOTES

1. Matica Slovenská [Slovak Matica] – all-nation cultural institution of Slovaks established in 1863 with the aim to develop Slovak national awareness, culture and science. It has become the key institution of Slovak national movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century. After Slovakia became the independent state it has been re-established as public entity

in 1997 by "Act on Matica slovenská" adopted by the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

2. Cited from the article by Slovak journalist Robert Matejovič published in the Pravda daily (Matejovič 1993). See also an essay by Timothy Garton Ash entitled "Long Live Ruthenia!" about Rusyn question, including his personal impression from talking to Prof. Turianytsia (Ash 1999).

3. Statement made by Konstantin Zatulin during the proceedings of international conference "Russia and Central-Eastern Europe" held in Moscow in January 1995. For materials of the conference see (Russia 1995).

4. Cited from the interview by foreign minister of Ukraine Anatoliiy Zlenko published in the Pravda daily on 22 February 1994.

5. For Austro-Hungarian and Czechoslovak statistics before WW II see (Magocsi 1978); for the Czechoslovak statistics after WW II see (Gajdoš, Konečný 1997).

6. It should be noted that Czechoslovak statistics from the interwar period include to the column *Rusyn* also people who registered themselves a Russians and Ukrainians – who migrated to Czechoslovakia after World War I.

7. See quotation of A. Zlenko's statement (footnote Nr 4).

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