

## REPORT

### A NEW SLAVIC LANGUAGE IS BORN

'We solemnly declare that from this day forward our Rusyn language is a normative and codified language ... and has become the literary language of Rusyns in Slovakia.' With these words, the representatives of the Rusyn Renaissance Society of Slovakia proclaimed on January 27, 1995, the existence of a new Slavic language. This language is for use by Rusyns, who since 1991 have been officially recognized as a distinct people with all due constitutional rights accorded each national minority in Slovakia.

The celebratory event held in the presence of representatives of the Slovak government, civic and religious organizations, and foreign dignitaries was the culmination of a cultural revival that began soon after the Revolution of 1989 and the demise of Communist rule in East Central Europe. The initial stage in the language-building process took place in November 1992 at the First Congress of the Rusyn Language, which brought together over fifty Rusyn writers, journalists, and scholars from all countries where the group lives (Ukraine, Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, Yugoslavia).

Within two months, already in January 1993, the Rusyn Renaissance Society established an Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture in Prešov, Slovakia. During the next two years, the institute's small staff headed by Associate Professors Vasyl' Jabur and Jurij Pan'ko periodically met with Rusyn writers and grammarians from other countries to resolve common linguistic problems and at the same time worked with local writers and journalists to create a Rusyn standard specifically for Slovakia.

The result was the publication in late 1994 of a *Rusyn Orthographic Rulebook* (*Pravyla rusyn'skoho pravopysu*), by V. Jabur and J. Pan'ko, a *Rusyn-Russian-Ukrainian-Slovak-Polish Dictionary of Linguistic Terminology* (*Rusyn'sko-rus'ko-ukrajins'ko-sloven'sko-pol'skŷj slovnyk lingvističnych terminiv*), by J. Pan'ko and an *Orthographic Dictionary of the Rusyn Language* (*Orfografičnyj slovnyk rusyn'skoho jazŷka*), J. Pan'ko et al. These three works, together with an elementary primer, *A Primer for Rusyn Children* (*Bukvar pro rusyn'skŷ dity*) and reader *A Reader for Rusyn Children* (*Čitanka pro rusyn'skŷ dity*) by a teacher, Jan Hyrb, provided the basis for the new Rusyn codified norm.

The first part of the celebratory event included a formal declaration proclaiming the codification of the Rusyn Language in Slovakia that was read in Rusyn and in Slovak by Jaroslav Sisak, director of the professional Rusyn-language Aleksander

Duchnový Theatre in Prešov. This was followed with remarks by Dr. Jan Bobák of the Matice Slovenská,<sup>1</sup> who compared the present work of Rusyn linguists with what L'udovít Štúr<sup>2</sup> had achieved for the Slovak language in the mid-nineteenth century.

The programme included a scholarly conference attended by over 75 cultural activists and scholars from the institutes of language, history, and ethnography of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. The conference included three presentations: 'The Carpatho-Rusyn Language in the Context of Contemporary Slavic Regional Literary Languages,' by Professor Aleksander Dulicenko (Tartu University, Estonia); 'The History of the Rusyn Language Question from the 18th Century to the Present,' by Professor Paul Robert Magocsi (University of Toronto, Canada); and 'Aspects of the Rusyn Literary Norm in Slovakia' by Associate Professor Vasyľ Jabur (Šafárik University, Slovakia). The texts of the three lectures together with other materials from the celebratory event will be published in late 1995 in the East European Monograph Series of Columbia University Press.

The codification of the Rusyn language in Slovakia actually represents the second of four Rusyn literary norms. One norm, Vojvodinian Rusyn, already exists and has been in widespread public use in Yugoslavia since World War II. The Rusyns of Slovakia now have a norm. It remains for the Rusyns of Ukraine (Transcarpathia) and Poland (the Lemko Region) to create their own norms. The goal to create four distinct norms and use them immediately in publications and schools is based on the 'Romansch model',<sup>3</sup> which was adopted at the First Rusyn Language Congress in November 1992. In other words, four norms will be created for each of the countries where Rusyns live, while at the same time all will be working on what will become a 'fifth norm,' or koiné, eventually to be used as a common literary standard by all. Actually, the newly-published *Dictionary of Rusyn Linguistic Terminology* already represents an agreed upon standard by Rusyns in all four countries.

The formal announcement of the codification of the Rusyn language received widespread media attention both before and after the event in Slovakia and in neighbouring countries. This was in part due to the efforts of Ukrainians (more precisely, Rusyns in Slovakia that adopted a Ukrainian national identity), who oppose the codification process as supposedly 'anti-Ukrainian,' 'unscholarly,' and a further step toward assimilation with Slovaks. As part of its campaign against codification of the Rusyn language, the Ukrainian-language press in Slovakia and neighbouring Ukraine argued that a 'Rusyn language never was and cannot be' – an ironic paraphrase of the words used by imperial Russian publicists and authorities who had outlawed the Ukrainian language in the nineteenth-century tsarist empire.

Despite such interventions, the Rusyn language has been codified in Slovakia. This formal act has many practical implications. While the Rusyn Renaissance Society with its weekly newspaper *People's Newspaper (Narodný novynký)*, bi-monthly magazine (*Rusyn*), and book publishing programme have been supported since 1991 by Slovakia's Ministry of Culture, further use of the language in public life was stalled by government bureaucrats who argued there had to be a literary norm before other kinds of activity could be undertaken. Now that the formal

codification has taken place, the procedural way is open for the creation of a Rusyn-language radio programme for eastern Slovakia and for Rusyn language courses (initially two hours weekly) to begin in September 1995 in ten elementary schools which have already requested a programme in Rusyn culture. To prepare teachers for the new programme, Slovakia's Ministry of Education has provided funding to create a Department of Rusyn Language and Culture at the Pedagogical Faculty of Šafárik University in Prešov. The new university department, which replaces the Rusyn Renaissance Society's Institute of Rusyn Language and Culture, was formally established as of January 1995.

Thus, the celebratory occasion on January 27, 1995 announcing the codification of the Rusyn language in Slovakia was both the culmination of a democratic process that began with the Revolution of 1989 as well as an important concrete step that has created a medium for the further propagation of Rusyn culture. The government of Slovakia is to be commended for implementing in deed as well as word a democratic and humanistic policy toward national minorities within its boundaries and, in particular, toward a fellow Slavic people, the Rusyns, with whom Slovaks have for centuries shared a common fate in the heart of Europe.

#### NOTES

1. The Matica Slovenská was among the earliest Slovak cultural organizations that first existed during the 1860s until closed by the Hungarian authorities. It was restored after World War I and continues to exist today as Slovakia's leading national cultural society, with its headquarters in Martin.
2. L'udovít Štúr (1815–1856) was a leader of the Pan-Slavic movement in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the most important figure in the codification of the Slovak literary language during the 1840s.
3. The Romansch model refers to the principle of first creating several dialectal literary standards and later an interdialectal literary *koiné* to function as a literary standard for all speakers. Romansch in Switzerland has five dialectal literary standards as well as a *koiné* called *Romansch grischun*.

