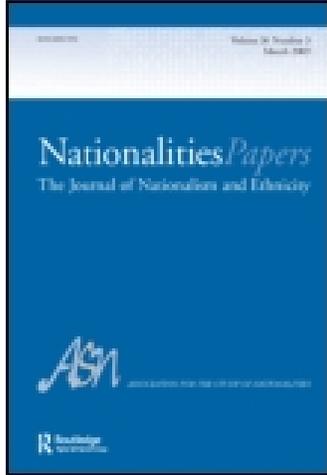


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The Hungarians in Transcarpathia (subcarpathian Rus')

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THE HUNGARIANS IN TRANSCARPATHIA (SUBCARPATHIAN RUS')

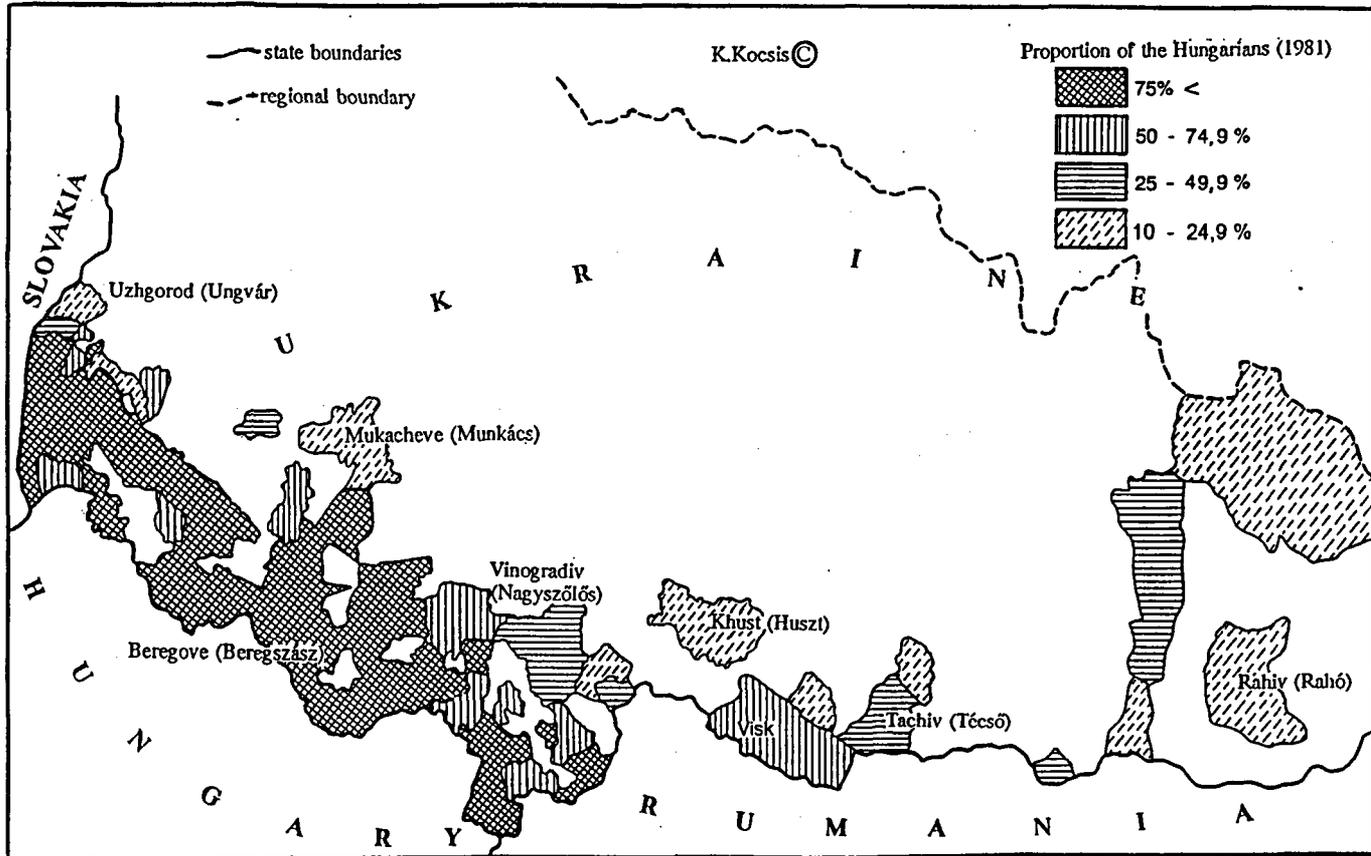
Paul Robert Magocsi

As in other countries of the Danubian Basin, the Hungarians of historic Subcarpathian Rus' (Hungarian—*Kárpátalja*), present-day Transcarpathia, did not become a national minority until 1919. Before then they were simply Hungarians—and part of the dominant state nationality—living in the northeastern corner of the Hungarian Kingdom. With the border changes that occurred in 1919–1920, the Hungarians of Transcarpathia/Subcarpathian Rus' found themselves within the borders of the new state of Czechoslovakia. Since then borders and countries have changed several times, so that Transcarpathia's Hungarians have found themselves in Czechoslovakia (1919–1938), again in Hungary (1938–1944), in the Soviet Union (1945–1991), and in an independent Ukraine (1991–present). Regardless of what state may have ruled Subcarpathian Rus'/Transcarpathia, it has remained a distinct administrative entity—at times, with a degree of autonomy—throughout most of the twentieth century.¹

The Sociodemographic Setting

The settlement pattern of the Hungarian minority has been stable. The majority of Hungarians reside in agricultural-based villages on the lowland plain adjacent to the border with Hungary. Nearly two-thirds live in the district of Berehovo/Beregszász with most of the remainder in the immediately adjacent areas of the Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, and Vynohradiv districts. Sixty-two percent of the population is rural, although there are also sizable Hungarian minorities in the region's administrative center Uzhhorod/Ungvár (16.6 percent) as well as in Mukachevo/Munkács (20.2 percent) and Vynohradiv/Nagyszollos (29 percent). The largest "Hungarian" city in the region is Berehovo/Beregszász, the center of the district of the same name where the 24,700 Hungarians represent 85 percent of the population.²

According to official census reports, the number of Hungarians in Transcarpathia has, in the course of the past seventy years, gradually increased, although their proportion to the rest of the region's population has declined.



MAP 5

Hungarian Areas of Settlement in Subcarpathian Rus'

THE HUNGARIANS IN TRANSCARPATHIA

Hungarians in Subcarpathian Rus'/Transcarpathia³

Census	Number	Percentage
1921	104,000	17.3
1930	110,000	15.4
1959	141,000	15.9
1970	151,000	14.3
1979	164,000	13.7
1989	156,000	12.5

Official data should, nevertheless, be used with caution. Since the last census, data taken annually by regional authorities has revised the number of Hungarians upward to 167,000 (1992), while unofficial estimates place their number at about 200,000.⁴

The Hungarians of Transcarpathia are a minority among minorities. Of the 1.3 million inhabitants in the province (1989), 78 percent were Rusyns and Ukrainians, 12.5 percent Hungarians, 3.4 percent Russians, 2 percent Romanians, 0.9 percent Gypsies, 0.5 Slovaks, and 1.6 percent Germans, Jews, and Belarusians.⁵ The minority status of Hungarians is also evident in religious affiliation. Whereas the Rusyn and Ukrainian majority are either Greek Catholic or Orthodox, the smaller Roman Catholic and Reformed Calvinist churches are almost exclusively comprised of Hungarians.⁶

Developments Before the Gorbachev Era

The Hungarians of Transcarpathia began their history as a minority in 1919 under Czechoslovak rule. For nearly twenty years that experience had both positive and negative features. On the one hand, the Hungarians enjoyed the liberties provided by a democratic state governed by the rule of law. On the other hand, the former privileged position of Hungarian-speaking officials and a Hungarian-dominated milieu in schools, churches, and cultural life that was characteristic of the pre-World War I era came to an end. Those blows to the status of Hungarians and their culture in part led to the creation of several Hungarian political parties that were critical of Czechoslovak rule and that throughout the interwar years worked closely with other parties in opposition to the government.⁷

It was therefore not surprising that during the last few months of the existence of the first Czechoslovak republic that followed the signing of the Munich Pact in September 1938, local Hungarian parties campaigned for the return of the province to Hungary. This eventually took place in two stages: the southern, mostly Hungarian-inhabited regions including the main cities of Uzhhorod, Mukachevo, and Berehovo were annexed 2 November 1938; the remainder of the province was annexed in mid-March 1939. The Carpatho-Ukrainian autonomous government that came into existence in October 1938 actually resisted with armed force Hungary's

final annexation, so that it could be said that World War II actually broke out in Transcarpathia (Carpatho-Ukraine) nearly half a year before Hitler's invasion of Poland. The result of this albeit limited conflict and the occupation that followed during World War II was alienation between large segments of the Transcarpathian population (most especially the Ukrainians) and the restored Hungarian government. Another factor to note was the position of the strongest political force in the region during the interwar years, the Communists. That party remained adamantly opposed to what it considered the "brutal annexation" of the region by "fascist Hungary."⁸

Such local conditions together with Hungary's subsequent defeat were to have dire consequences for Transcarpathia's Hungarian minority when, after World War II, it found itself within the borders of the Soviet Union. Already in 1945, as part of its policy against suspect wartime "collaborationist" populations within its borders, the Soviet authorities deported all Hungarian males between the ages of 18 and 50 to work camps in the remote eastern regions of the Soviet Union. Estimates place the number at 45,000 who were forcibly deported. Some were held for nearly a decade; many never returned from the vast Soviet gulag. Aside from the deportations, all existing Hungarian organizations were banned and the activity of the Roman Catholic and Reformed Calvinist churches were severely curtailed.⁹ In general, Transcarpathia, like the rest of the Soviet Union, was intent on creating for its inhabitants a new kind of patriotism that in part was based on the heroic deeds of the Red Army as well as the suffering inflicted by external invaders during World War II. In that context, historic Hungary and the culture it represented was equated with oppression of the working classes. These workers invariably were the downtrodden Slavs whose desires for liberation were only fulfilled with the arrival of the Red Army in late 1944 and the "reannexation" less than one year later of Transcarpathia to the Soviet Ukraine. It seemed to make little difference that neighboring Hungary was also by then a Communist-ruled worker's state. In other words, Hungarian culture and, therefore, Hungarians themselves were scorned in immediate postwar Transcarpathia. Their only hope was to become divorced from their traditional Hungarian heritage and instead to become reeducated as socially enlightened class-conscious Soviet men and women.

In order to create "Soviet Hungarians," the regime gave support to a few writers, editors, and journalists. They were expected to publish works in Hungarian that praised the new sociopolitical order, that followed the guidelines of socialist realism, that is, works written in a manner that was both understandable and inspirational to the masses. In the administrative center of Uzhhorod, a Hungarian section of the Karpaty publishing house (Kárpáti Kiadó) was set up, and from 1951 it began to publish Hungarian translations of Soviet "classics" (Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev) and of other Russian and Ukrainian works, a few original literary works by local Hungarian authors, and from 1957 an annual almanac (*Kárpáti kalendárium*). The Hungarians also got their own branch of the Soviet school-book publishing house (Ragyanszka Skola Tankönyvkiadó). Several Hungarian-language newspapers were

published as well, whether as organs of the regional (*Kárpáti igaz szó*) or district (*Vörös zászló*, *Kommunizmus zászlaja*, *Kommunizmus fényei*) Communist party organizations or of the Communist Youth League (*Kárpátoniuli ifjúság*). For the longest time, however, these were simply translations of Russian or Ukrainian newspapers.¹⁰

Of particular importance in creating new ideologically reliable citizens was the school system. Marxist–Leninist nationality policy recognized the need for schools using the languages of national minorities, and the Hungarians of Transcarpathia were no exception. To assist in these efforts, a Department of Hungarian Language was established in 1963 at Uzhhorod State University to train teachers and to carry out research, most especially on Transcarpathia's Hungarian dialects.¹¹ By the 1989/1990 school year there were 84 schools in which Hungarian was taught (54 elementary and 30 secondary). During the previous two decades, however, the actual composition of the school system had changed. Following a pattern common in other parts of the former Soviet Union, there was a marked trend toward replacing unilingual with bilingual schools. Thus, in the two decades between 1968 and 1989, the number of unilingual Hungarian schools decreased from 93 to 53, while the number of bilingual Ukrainian–Hungarian and Russian–Hungarian schools increased from 6 to 31.¹² Moreover, despite their nominal Hungarian nature, for over forty-five years these schools never taught students any history of Hungary, while the Hungarian literature that was allowed included only those authors from the past and the few post-1945 Soviet Hungarian writers who were deemed to be ideologically reliable.¹³

From the Gorbachev Era to an Independent Ukraine

All aspects of Soviet society were to be profoundly influenced following the ascension in 1985 of the reform-minded Mikhail Gorbachev to the post of General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. While it did take some time for his policies of restructuring (*perestroika*) and openness (*glasnost*) to reach the peripheral areas of the Soviet Union, the Gorbachev phenomenon did finally make it to Transcarpathia by the end of the decade. The Hungarian minority, moreover, was among the first groups to participate in and profit from the new political and social environment.¹⁴

Neighboring Hungary was to play an important role in this process. After four decades of silence, Hungary's media began in 1987 to speak openly for the first time about the past difficulties and present situation of Transcarpathia's Hungarians. Then, during a state visit to Budapest in April 1988, the Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko signed with the Hungarian government a joint communiqué that called for increased cultural activity (including an Institute of Hungarian Studies at Uzhhorod State University) and travel opportunities for Transcarpathia's minorities.

It was the year 1989, however, that witnessed a concerted renewal of Hungarian

life in Transcarpathia. Early in the year travel restrictions were eased, which resulted in a veritable flood of Transcarpathia's Hungarians visiting relatives and friends in northeastern Hungary or simply going to see for the first time what for Soviet citizens was the legendary Hungarian economic "miracle." Hungary's party and government officials as well as Roman Catholic and Reformed Calvinist hierarchs, in turn, visited Transcarpathia for the first time.

As for the Hungarians in Transcarpathia, they set up in February 1989 their first large-scale independent civic organization, the Hungarian Cultural Association of Subcarpathia (Kárpátaljai Magyar Kulturális Szövetség). Headed by the Uzhhorod University Hungarian-language specialist Sándor Fodó, the new organization began with 500 members and before the end of the year burgeoned into 175 chapters with 30,000 members. This meant that the Hungarian Cultural Association of Subcarpathia (HCAS) had effectively become the second largest political/civic organization after the local Communist party, which at the time had about 45,000 members. During the next two years the HCAS reinvigorated the debate about culture and politics in the local Hungarian press; pressured local authorities to reverse the bilingual trend in the school system and to establish for the first time Hungarian-language nursery schools (55 by 1990); and succeeded in having Hungarian history taught in schools. Although not a political party, the HCAS did nominate candidates in the 1990 local elections. Its eleven deputies in the 124-seat Transcarpathian regional parliament (Narodna Rada) eventually joined with other oppositional parties to form a bloc of fifty deputies.

The political situation changed dramatically in August 1991, when, following the failed anti-Gorbachev putsch, Ukraine declared its independence. This declaration was to be put to the country's citizens for confirmation in a nation-wide referendum to be held on 1 December 1991. During the intervening months until the referendum, the Hungarians reacted to the new political situation by creating the Hungarian Democratic Alliance of Ukraine—HDAU. The new organization, also headed by Sándor Fodó and based in Uzhhorod, had specifically political goals. It intended to coordinate Hungarian political and cultural activities throughout Ukraine, although its emphasis was obviously on Transcarpathia where the vast majority of the country's Hungarians lived. The HDAU came out in favor of an independent Ukraine, but at the same time condemned extreme nationalism and declared its intention to work against any possible conflict that might arise between Transcarpathia's many nationalities.

The allusion to actual or potential conflict underscored the precarious status of Transcarpathia's Hungarians as a minority among minorities. For nearly forty years, Transcarpathia's Hungarians lived in what was ostensibly a Ukrainian province, but which in fact was subject to the same policies of Sovietization and Russification that were typical of other parts of the Soviet Union. With the dissolution of Soviet centralized rule in the late 1980s, the Ukrainians began to reassert their linguistic, cultural, and political rights. At the very same time, one segment of the indigenous

East Slavic population who identified itself by the local historic name Rusyn, challenged the Ukrainians. They argued that the Rusyn national orientation was the most legitimate one to be promoted in Transcarpathia.

Consequently, two rival national orientations which had existed before Soviet rule arose once again. One argued that the East Slavic population was Ukrainian and that Transcarpathia should be an integral part of a unitary independent Ukrainian state. The other argued that Rusyns were a distinct nationality and that Transcarpathia should have its historic autonomous status restored in a federal Ukrainian state. The Ukrainian orientation was represented by the Transcarpathian branches of the Movement for Restructuring Ukraine, better known by its acronym RUKH, and the Taras Shevchenko Language Society. The Rusyn orientation was represented by the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns founded in Uzhhorod in February 1990. The idea of autonomy was also supported by several members of the Transcarpathian regional parliament and other government and cultural activists.¹⁵

As a minority among either a Ukrainian or a Rusyn majority, the Hungarians were faced with a dilemma. Which group should they support, and after they chose, to what degree would the other become alienated? The matter came to a head during the debates about the issue of autonomy.

Actually, the issue was first broached by the Hungarian Cultural Association of Subcarpathia already in late 1990, when it called for cultural autonomy for all Hungarians living in what should become a distinct administrative territory within Transcarpathia. That goal was then put on the agenda of the Transcarpathian parliament by its Hungarian deputies. Within a month after Ukraine was declared a sovereign state in August 1991, the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns demanded autonomy for all of Transcarpathia and proposed that the entire population of the province should be asked to vote on the issue in the December 1 referendum on Ukrainian independence. The Hungarians actively cooperated with the Rusyns and other minorities—Russians, Romanians, Slovaks, Germans, Gypsies, and even a small Jewish community in Mukachevo—all of whom were part of a Democratic League of Nationalities set up in October 1991. Not only did the HCAS support the call for autonomy, but leaders in the Berehovo/Beregszász district called for yet another question to be placed on the 1 December referendum. If approved, Berehovo/Beregszász would be transformed into a Hungarian national autonomous district (*Magyar Autonóm Körzet*).

The local Ukrainians were furious at this turn of events. Ever since the Hungarian parliamentary deputies had proposed cultural autonomy, the Ukrainians opposed any kind of autonomous status for Transcarpathia, arguing that this would compromise the sovereignty of Ukraine. For them, the rights of all minorities, including the free use of their native languages in all spheres of public life and government support of minority cultures, were guaranteed by a declaration proclaimed in November 1991. In fact, Ukraine's liberal policy regarding its national minorities was noted by many international observers, including the Hungarian media which since that time de-

scribes the status of Hungarians in Transcarpathia as being better than the status of any other Hungarian minority in the Danubian Basin.

Despite strenuous protests by local Ukrainian activists during the fall of 1991 (including demonstrations and a public hunger strike), the Transcarpathian parliament reached a compromise formula with the chairman of the Supreme Soviet and presidential candidate, Leonid Kravchuk. The 1 December memorandum on Ukrainian independence was to include two other questions as well, (1) should Transcarpathia become a "self-governing administrative territory" within Ukraine; and (2) should the Berehovo/Beregszász district become an autonomous national district? This was the first time in history that the population of Transcarpathia was asked (83 percent of eligible voters participated) in an open and free election about their future political status. The results were: 93 percent in favor of Ukrainian independence; 78 percent in favor of autonomy for Transcarpathia; and 81 percent for a Hungarian autonomous national district in Berehovo/Beregszász.¹⁶

The euphoria and expectations surrounding the results of the December 1, 1991 referendum did not last long, however. Kravchuk, who won the presidential elections held on the same day of the referendum, had promised that autonomy could be established as early as January or February 1992. Yet, to date (early 1994), neither autonomy for Transcarpathia nor a Hungarian national district has been established. Moreover, local Ukrainian activists have kept up their struggle against autonomy, characterizing any such demands as opposed to the interests of the Ukrainian state. At the same time, the country has been overwhelmed by hyper-inflation and a general economic crisis, so that no decision has even been reached whether Ukraine will be a federal or unitary state. As for Transcarpathian autonomy, both the government and parliament have stalled on the issue arguing that the region could go the way of Crimea, whose Tatar leadership in June 1991 declared their region's sovereignty.¹⁷

There is, indeed, some justification for such fears. Frustrated by the inaction of Ukraine's central government and Transcarpathia's parliament on the autonomy issue, the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns spearheaded a movement which, in May 1993, created a Provisional Government for Subcarpathian Rus'. At well-publicized press conferences in Budapest, Bratislava, and Vienna, the Provisional Government's spokespersons declared the 1945 treaty uniting Transcarpathia with Ukraine null and void, proclaimed Subcarpathian Rus' an autonomous republic, and expressed the intention to negotiate a valid treaty that would before the end of the year, unite the "Republic of Subcarpathian Rus'" with Ukraine. In the interim, the region's inhabitants should "ignore the Ukrainian government's administration in Transcarpathia."¹⁸

The pace and direction of such developments raised concerns among the Hungarian leadership. Their support of autonomy and cooperation with the Rusyns had clearly alienated the local Ukrainians who began to raise the specter of "traditional" Hungarian disloyalty and anti-Ukrainianism. On the other hand, while Berehovo/Beregszász may not yet have gained the status of a national district, the Hungarian

minority was enjoying the fruits of Ukraine's liberal law on national minorities. Also, Hungary and Ukraine were experiencing excellent bilateral relations, and both governments were pointing with pride to the favorable manner in which Hungarians were being treated in Transcarpathia.

Faced with such larger political realities, by late 1992 the Hungarian Cultural Association of Subcarpathia distanced itself from the Democratic League of Nationalities and refrained from pushing the autonomy issue. Since that time, some kind of accommodation seems to have been reached with the Ukrainian authorities. It remains to be seen what strategy the Hungarians will adopt in their relations with other nationalities in Transcarpathia, in particular toward the Rusyns and Ukrainians. In the end, the Hungarians are likely to do whatever is necessary to make the best out of their fate as a minority among minorities.

NOTES

1. The various changes in the area's political status have included: (1) an autonomous region, Rus'ka Kraina, during the period of the short-lived Hungarian republic (December 1918–April 1919); (2) a semi-autonomous province of Subcarpathian Rus' in the first Czechoslovak republic (May 1919–September 1938); (3) an autonomous province of Carpatho-Ukraine in a federated Czecho-Slovak state (October 1938–March 1939); (4) the territory of Subcarpathia (*Kárpátalja vajdaság*) in an expanded wartime Hungary (March 1939–September 1944); and (5) the Transcarpathian oblast of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (January 1946–August 1991) and an independent Ukraine (September 1991–present).
2. The statistics on urban areas are from 1981 and are found in Károly Kocsis, "Kárpátalja," *Élet és tudomány*, XIV (Budapest, 1989), p. 436.
3. *Statističké lexikon obcí v Podkarpatské Rusi* [1921] (Prague, 1928), p. 45; *Statističké lexikon obcí v Zemi podkarpatoruské* [1930] (Prague, 1937), p. xv; V. P. Kopchak and S. I. Kopchak, *Naselenie Zakarpat'ia za 100 let* (L'viv, 1977), pp. 66–71; Stephen Rapawy, *Ukraine and the Border Issues* (Washington, DC, 1993), p. 39.
4. Alfred A. Reisch, "Transcarpathia's Hungarian Minority and the Autonomy Issue," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 7 February, 1992, p. 18.
5. *Naselennia Ukraïns'koï RSR za dannyi vsesoiuznoho perepysu naselennia 1989 r.* (Kiev, 1990), pp. 153–161. The name *Rusyn* is not recognized in official documents and is classified as Ukrainian; therefore, it is impossible to know how many Rusyns there are. Of the 977,000 Ukrainians recorded in the 1989 census, the number of Rusyns (according to Rusyn and Hungarian sources) is estimated between 600,000 and 800,000. A survey conducted in late 1991–1992 by the Institute of Sociology of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences reported that from a sample of 1,300 Transcarpathian residents, 28 percent (by statistical projection *circa* 350,000) considered Rusyns to be a distinct nationality. Petro Tokar, "Tko my es'me?," *Podkarpats'ka Rus'* (Uzhhorod), 10 September, 1992.
6. According to the 1930 Czechoslovak census there was an equal number of Roman Catholics and Reformed Calvinist adherents. Since World War II, there are 84 Reformed Calvinist churches and 53 Roman Catholic parishes and affiliates. József Botlik and György Dupka, *Ez hát a hon...: tények, adatok, dokumentumok a kárpátaljai magyarság életéből 1918–1991* (Budapest and Szeged, 1991), pp. 255–260.
7. For further details on the interwar period, see Paul Robert Magocsi, "Magyars and Carpatho-Rusyns," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*, XIV, 3–4 (Cambridge, MA, 1990), pp. 429–438.

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8. On the wartime years, see Paul Robert Magocsi, *The Shaping of a National Identity: Subcarpathian Rus', 1849–1948* (Cambridge, MA, 1978), pp. 234–249.
9. For further details on the early years of Soviet rule, see Botlik and Dupka, *Ez hát a hon*, pp. 54–66 and 141–152.
10. For further details on the period of Soviet rule before Gorbachev, see *ibid.*, pp. 67–121 ff.; and Steven Bela Vardy, “The Hungarians of the Carpatho-Ukraine: From Czechoslovak to Soviet Rule,” in Stephen Borsody, ed., *The Hungarians: A Divided Nation* (New Haven, CT, 1988), pp. 209–227—an expanded version appeared as “Soviet Nationality Policy in Carpatho-Ukraine Since World War II: The Hungarians of Sub-Carpathia,” *Hungarian Studies Review*, XVI, 1–2 (Toronto, 1989), pp. 67–91.
11. Péter Lizanec, “A magyar nyelv és irodalom oktatása az uzsgorodi Allami Egyetemen,” in Judit Róna, ed., *Hungarológiai oktatás régen és ma* (Budapest, 1983), pp. 36–40. A comprehensive bibliography of the results of the Department’s scholarship is in a recent monumental dialectal atlas of the region by Transcarpathia’s leading Hungarian linguist: P. N. Lizanec, *A kárpátaljai magyar nyelvjárások atlasza/Atlas vengerskikh gorovorov Zakarpat'ia*, Vol. I (Budapest, 1992), esp. pp. 59–66.
12. Botlik and Dupka, *Ez hát a hon*, pp. 250–254.
13. Among the best known writers from this period are László Balla (b. 1927) and Vilmos Kovács (1927–1977). See Lajos M. Takács, comp., *Vergődő szél: a kárpátaljai magyar irodalom antológiája 1953–1988* (Budapest and Uzhhorod, 1990).
14. The following is based in large part on Reisch, “Transcarpathia’s Hungarian Minority,” pp. 17–23; and the chronology of events by Kálmán Móricz, “Kárpátalja (Ukrajna),” in *Magyarság és Európa: évkönyv 1992* (Budapest, [1993]), pp. 167–207.
15. Paul Robert Magocsi, “The Birth of a New Nation, or the Return of an Old Problem? The Rusyns of East Central Europe,” *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, XXXIV, 3 (Edmonton, Alta., 1992), esp. pp. 207–212.
16. Taras Kuzio and Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine: Perestroika to Independence* (Edmonton, Alta., 1994), p. 196.
17. The debates for and against Transcarpathian autonomy both before and after the 1 December, 1991 referendum are discussed in each issue of the quarterly *Carpatho-Rusyn American*, XV–XVI (Pittsburgh, PA, 1992–1993).
18. “Obrashchenie Vremennogo pravitel'stva Podkarpatskoi Rusi k narodam Zakarpat'skoi oblasti,” *Podkarpats'ka Rus'* (Uzhhorod), 3 July 1993.