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The heritage of autonomy in Carpathian Rus' and Ukraine's Transcarpathian region

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As the Soviet Union disintegrated and eventually dissolved in 1991, many of its peoples, both so-called titular nationalities and national minorities, put forth demands for independence or, at the very least, self-rule for territories that were said to represent the national patrimony. Among the many peoples who put forward such demands were Carpatho-Rusyns, who, together with fellow citizens of other national backgrounds, demanded autonomy or self-rule for the region (oblast) of Transcarpathia in far western Ukraine. This essay examines from a historical perspective the question of autonomy or self-rule for Carpatho-Rusyns and for all or part of the territory they inhabit, historic Carpathian Rus'. The autonomy question in Carpathian Rus' is hardly new, but one that goes as far back as 1848.

Keywords: autonomy; Carpatho-Rusyns; Czechoslovakia; Transcarpathia; Ukraine

As the Soviet Union disintegrated and eventually dissolved in 1991, many of its peoples, both so-called titular nationalities and national minorities, put forth demands for independence or, at the very least, self-rule for territories that were said to represent the national patrimony. Among the many peoples who put forward such demands were Carpatho-Rusyns, who, together with fellow citizens of other national backgrounds, demanded autonomy or self-rule for the region (oblast) of Transcarpathia in far western Ukraine.

The formal request for Transcarpathian self-rule took the form of a regional referendum, approved by 78% of the region's inhabitants, in the course of Ukraine's own referendum for independence that was held on 1 December 1991. The Ukrainian authorities, beginning with president-elect Leonid Kravchuk, promised that should the referendum be approved by a majority of voters, self-rule would be implemented in Transcarpathia within a few months, that is, early in 1992.

To date, the Ukrainian government has refused to implement autonomy. Nevertheless, local Carpatho-Rusyn activists have continued to demand that the propositions of the 1991 referendum on self-rule be fulfilled. Since December 2007, they have renewed their demands, this time proclaiming a sovereign republic of Subcarpathian Rus' whose status would hopefully be guaranteed by Russia. Such provocative political demands have attracted the attention of the international media – especially online news – and they have caused some concern and finally concrete reactions on the part of Ukraine's governing

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and security services. The goal of this essay is to examine from a historical perspective the question of autonomy or self-rule for Carpatho-Rusyns and for all or part of the territory they inhabit, historic Carpathian Rus'. As will become evident, the autonomy question in Carpathian Rus' is hardly new, but one that goes as far back as 1848.

Definition of terms

Before looking at the historic record, it would be useful to briefly define a few terms: *autonomy*, *Carpatho-Rusyn*, and *Carpathian Rus'*. The term *autonomy* derives from the Greek words *autos* (self) and *nomos* (rule); hence, self-rule. Autonomy assumes that a representative organ of a particular territory or region has the right to issue laws and decrees which become valid for that given territory. An autonomous region is not sovereign but exists within the framework of a higher legal-administrative body, whether a kingdom, empire, or modern nation-state. Put another way, an autonomous territory is not a state within a state but rather a legal-administrative entity of a lower order. In practice, various degrees of autonomy can exist, with some territories having the right to issue a wide range of self-governing laws, and others having autonomy in certain limited spheres, such as the economy, education, or culture.

The term *Carpatho-Rusyn* refers to the East Slavic inhabitants residing in a historic territory called *Carpathian Rus'*. It is only one of several ethnonyms that has been used to describe the region's East Slavs. The population itself traditionally self-identified as *Rusnak* or *Rusyn*. The term *Rusyn* (in English *Ruthenian*) is, however, rather vague, since in the distant past it referred to all East Slavs (modern-day Belarusians and Ukrainians) in the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as well as to Slavic Eastern-rite Christians in the northeastern Hungarian Kingdom.

Other terms reflected the national convictions of the group's intellectual and civic leaders, who in the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries might call the group *Carpatho-Russian* if they believed they were part of the Russian nationality or *Carpatho-Ukrainian* if part of the Ukrainian nationality. Those who believed the group formed a distinct nationality might use the terms *Uhro-Rusyn* (which also implied a pro-Hungarian political orientation), *Subcarpathian Rusyn* (which implied a pro-Czechoslovak political orientation), or *Lemko* (a regional term that applied only to Rusyns north of the Carpathians in what is today southeastern Poland). Inevitably, the choice of ethnonym implied not only a conviction about one's national belonging but also political allegiance to a state that already existed or one that hopefully would come into existence. In an effort to avoid political bias and the vagueness implied by the word *Rusyn*, this study will use the term *Carpatho-Rusyn*, since it indicates both an ethnolinguistic association (Rus') and geographical location (the Carpathian Mountains).

Since the territory of Carpathian Rus' is determined by where Carpatho-Rusyns lived, how does one determine who is a Carpatho-Rusyn? The criteria used here are the official Austro-Hungarian census report in which at least 50% of the inhabitants of a village or small town indicated their mother tongue or nationality as *Rusyn* or *Carpatho-Rusyn*. These statistics were based on responses to the question of mother tongue, which was a much more reliable indicator of ethnic origin (nationality). By contrast, the post-World War I successor states of Austria-Hungary called on its citizens to indicate their nationality, with the result that many persons did not identify with their ethnolinguistic group, but rather with the state in which they lived and held citizenship.

Since Carpatho-Rusyns have been and still are a stateless people, it is not surprising that their numbers as reflected in official statistics have varied greatly. This has particularly been



Figure 1. Carpathian rus'.

the case in the twentieth century, when they were subjected to various forms of national assimilation and after World War II even forbidden to identify themselves as Carpatho-Rusyns by the state authorities (i.e. Communist regimes) that ruled their homeland. Hence, the only relatively reliable data on identity are the pre-World War I Austro-Hungarian censuses, on the basis of which the territorial extent of Carpathian Rus' is determined for the purposes of this study (Magocsi 1998, 2011).

Before World War I, Carpathian Rus' was located within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, within the two parts of that state. Rusyns living on the western slopes of the Carpathians (the Lemko Region) were under the administration of the Austrian province of Galicia; those living on the southern slopes (the Prešov Region, Subcarpathian Rus', and Maramureş) were spread throughout several counties in the northeastern part of the Hungarian Kingdom. According to present-day boundaries, Carpathian Rus' is located within relatively small contiguous areas of four states: southeastern Poland (the Lemko Region), northeastern Slovakia (the Prešov Region), western Ukraine (the Transcarpathian oblast), and north-central Romania (Maramureş) (Figure 1).

The quest for Carpatho-Rusyn autonomy

Demands for Rusyn autonomy date back to 1848, when the Habsburg-ruled Austrian Empire was profoundly shaken by revolution and civil war.¹ The greatest threat to imperial rule came from the eastern part of the empire, Hungary, which proclaimed its independence in 1849. At that time, the leading Carpatho-Rusyn political activist was a mining engineer named Adolf Dobrians'kyi; he opposed the Hungarian revolution and remained loyal to the Habsburg imperial throne. After the defeat of the Hungarians, Dobrians'kyi headed a delegation of Austria's Rusyns, which in October 1849 prepared a memorandum for the Habsburg emperor. The memorandum called for the creation of an autonomous region to comprise territories inhabited not only by Carpatho-Rusyns but all Rusyns (officially known as Ruthenians) within the Austrian Empire; that is, territory that included eastern

Galicia and Bukovina in Austria and the Prešov Region and Subcarpathian Rus' in Hungary. The Habsburg authorities were not, however, ready to restructure their empire, and as a mark of understanding and loyalty toward the emperor Dobrians'kyi agreed to withdraw this first memorandum. Within a few weeks (19 October), this time it was only a delegation of Carpatho-Rusyns who were back in Vienna where they submitted to the emperor a new memorandum calling for the recognition of Rusyns as a distinct nationality and for the creation of a special Rusyn district in northeastern Hungary.

Having crushed the revolution in Hungary, the Habsburgs placed the kingdom under martial law and administered it directly from Vienna. Hungary was divided into five military districts, each of which was subdivided into civil districts. The Košice (Hungarian: Kassa) military district had three civil districts, one of which was based in Uzhhorod, the largest city in Subcarpathian Rus'. In November 1849, Dobrians'kyi was appointed vice-administrator of the Uzhhorod Civil District (German: Distrikt Ungvár), where he was able to implement several measures to enhance the status of his native Rus' culture. Popularly known as the Rusyn District (Rusyn: Rus'kŷi okruh), it comprised the Hungarian counties of Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa, and Máramoros. Although the Uzhhorod/Rusyn District lasted for only a little more than a year, its very existence implanted in the mindset of local civic and cultural activists the view that Carpatho-Rusyns were a distinct people deserving of autonomy.²

Dobrians'kyi continued to press the cause of autonomy. In 1860, when the imperial Austrian authorities made provision to reconvene the Hungarian Parliament, as an elected deputy Dobrians'kyi (who was not allowed to take his seat) formulated a proposal to have the Hungarian Kingdom divided into five national districts, one of which was a Carpatho-Rusyn district. Throughout the 1860s, other Carpatho-Rusyn secular and Greek Catholic Church activists continued to formulate demands for cultural autonomy (Mayer 1997, 28–37).

All these efforts were undermined as a result of the so-called Compromise (*Ausgleich*) of 1867, whereby the Habsburg Monarchy was restructured and transformed into the Austro-Hungarian Dual Monarchy. Within a few years, after the centralized Hungarian Kingdom adopted increasingly intolerant politics toward all non-Magyar peoples within its borders, there was little hope that Carpatho-Rusyn demands for any kind of special status would ever be granted. Dobrians'kyi himself was implicated in a trial for alleged treason against Austria-Hungary. After his acquittal in 1882, he was forced to leave the Hungarian Kingdom, eventually settling in the far western Austrian city of Innsbruck, where for the rest of his life (until 1901) he continued to publish tracts proposing the restructuring of Austro-Hungary on the basis of federal nationality-based territorial units.

The next phase of the Carpatho-Rusyn autonomy question was again connected with a period of profound political change, this time coinciding with the closing months of World War I in late 1918. At the end of October, Austria-Hungary ceased to exist and Hungary was declared an independent republic. As for Carpatho-Rusyns, they were at the time meeting in national councils, each of which issued declarations calling for self-rule within whatever state might eventually control their homeland. Even earlier, in 1917, Carpatho-Rusyn immigrants in the USA convened the first of several public meetings which addressed future political alternatives for their European homeland which, in their view, should at the very least be granted autonomy or even independence. Carpatho-Rusyn immigrants, eventually represented by the young Pittsburgh lawyer Gregory Zhatkovych, were especially successful in making their views and political demands known to the highest levels of the USA government, which included two personal meetings with President Woodrow Wilson.³

Perhaps not surprisingly, the new leaders of the independent republic of Hungary (Mihaly Károly) as well as their successors who transformed the fledgling Hungarian republic into a Bolshevik-ruled entity (led by Béla Kun) were desperate to retain the borders of the prewar kingdom. As part of these efforts, on 10 December 1918, Hungary proclaimed the existence of an autonomous entity within its borders called the Rus' Land – in Hungarian: Ruszka Krajna and in Rusyn: Rus'ka Kraina (Botlik 2005a, v. I, 73–137). The new entity had its own governor appointed by Budapest and a provisional parliament (Soim) made up of local Rusyn activists, which was convened in February 1919. The parliament even continued to exist for a few weeks after the Hungarian Bolsheviks came to power in April, at which time a draft of a constitution for the Rus' Land was announced (Spivak and Troian 1967). The territorial extent of the proposed autonomous region was to include the Rusyn-inhabited parts of five counties in both Subcarpathian Rus' (present-day Ukraine) and the Prešov Region (present-day Slovakia) – from east to west: Maramorosh, Bereg, Ung, Zemplyn, and Sharysh (“Konstytutsiia Rus'koï Krainy” 1919). The political constellation of postwar Europe, did not, however, favor Hungary, which was considered by the victorious Allies to be one of the defeated powers and, therefore, deserving of punishment for having been part of defeated Austria-Hungary.

Meanwhile, Carpatho-Rusyn leaders meeting in various national councils between November 1918 and May 1919 discussed various political solutions: remaining with Hungary; union with Russia, Ukraine, or Czechoslovakia; or independence. Immigrant activists in the USA, urged by none other than President Wilson, voted in a referendum (November 1918) which favored the Czechoslovak option, although on the understanding that their homeland, called Rusinia at the time, would form one of the three parts of what was called in contemporary sources, the Czecho-Slovak-Rusyn federal republic (“Chekhoslovatska-rus'ka respublyka” 1919). It is with this understanding that Carpatho-Rusyn leaders, joined by representatives of their immigrant brethren, met in Uzhhorod from 8 to 16 May 1919 to form the Central Rusyn National Council, which proclaimed the voluntary union of their people with the new state of Czechoslovakia (*Protokoly* 1919).

It is interesting to note that during this same period – and for the first time in their history – Carpatho-Rusyns on the northern slopes of the mountains in the Lemko Region also became politically active. They rejected Poland's claims on their territory and in late 1918 proclaimed two Lemko Rusyn republics, first in November at Komańcza and then in December at Florynka (Horbal 1997). The first “republic” lasted only a few weeks, but the second functioned for nearly 16 months. The Lemko Rusyns who met in Florynka and then Gorlice initially called for unification with a future democratic Russia, but by the end of 1918 their leaders joined with Carpatho-Rusyns south of the mountains and favored becoming part of Czechoslovakia. In fact, it was the Lemko Rusyns who first delineated the borders of a Carpathian Rus' “state” (including the Lemko Region, Prešov Region, Subcarpathian Rus', and Maramureș), which they described in petitions (with maps) submitted to the Paris Peace Conference (Beskid and Sobin 1919; Horbal 2004, 139–162). When, however, Carpatho-Rusyn leaders met in Uzhhorod in May 1919, they formally rejected the request to include the Lemko Region as part of the “Carpatho-Rusyn state” within Czechoslovakia. Consequently, the Lemko Rusyns were forced to retain their “independent” Lemko Rus' People's Republic (Rusyn: Ruska narodna republika Lemkiv) along the northern slopes of the Carpathians until it was dissolved by the Polish authorities in early 1920.

Although Czechoslovakia did not become the federal state of three equal Slavic nationalities that Carpatho-Rusyns anticipated, it did provide a special status to its far eastern region, which was officially called Subcarpathian Rus' (Czech: Podkarpatská Rus).⁴

Czechoslovak delegates proposed to the Paris Peace Conference (to quote Article 10 of the Treaty of St. Germain-en-Laye of September 1919) that the “Ruthene territory south of the Carpathians” be granted “the fullest degree of autonomy compatible with the unity of the Czechoslovak state” (*Traité* 1919). Other provisions of the St. Germain Treaty called for a regional diet and governor responsible for linguistic, educational, and religious matters (Article 11); for the appointment of officials from the local population (Article 12); and for elected representatives to the national parliament (Article 13). These formulations about autonomy were reiterated in the Paris Peace Conference Treaty of Trianon with Hungary, signed in October 1920, and it was enshrined in the Czechoslovak constitution promulgated in February 1920. None of these documents, however, indicated any boundaries for the proposed autonomous “Ruthene territory.” Moreover, throughout the entire period of Czechoslovak rule (1919–1939), the Carpatho-Rusyns remained administratively divided, with four-fifths living in Subcarpathian Rus’ (372,500 in 1921) and the remaining one-fifth under Slovak administration in the area that became known as the Prešov Region (85,600).

And what was the special autonomous status that the Czechoslovak regime reserved for Subcarpathian Rus’?⁵ The province did have its own governor (the first was the Rusyn-American civic activist Gregory Zhatkovych) who was appointed by the Czechoslovak president, and Rusyn was made an official language alongside Czech. In the course of 1918, when Zhatkovych was still negotiating with Czechoslovak leaders-in-exile in America, he expected that autonomy would be immediately implemented, that a regional parliament (*soim*) would be convened which would have control over the local budget, and that Rusyn-inhabited lands “temporarily” under Slovak administration in the Prešov Region would be united with Subcarpathian Rus’. Initially, a “provisional” boundary between Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus’ was set along the Uzh River; then in 1928, the boundary was pushed slightly westward, bringing a few thousand more Carpatho-Rusyns into Subcarpathian Rus’. But all these demands were put on hold by the Czechoslovak authorities, who argued that Subcarpathia’s inhabitants were not yet ready to govern themselves. In response, the now frustrated Zhatkovych resigned in early 1921, and returned to the USA, while Carpatho-Rusyn leaders launched an ongoing campaign (including petitions to the League of Nations and interventions by Rusyn deputies and senators in the Czechoslovak parliament), all of which were aimed at protesting Czechoslovakia’s reluctance to grant the promised autonomy (*Memorandum karpato-russkago naroda* 1922; Kurtyák 1928; *Expose* 1921; Yuhasz 1929).

By the 1930s, specific bills outlining proposals for Subcarpathian autonomy were introduced into the Czechoslovak parliament by leaders of the Rusyn-oriented autonomist (Ivan Kurtiak) and Russian-oriented nationalist (Shtefan Fentsyk) parties (“Zakonoproekt ... Kurtiak” 1930; “Proekt ... Fentsika” 1936). Eventually, the leading representatives of the otherwise competing pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian national orientations decided to join forces and renew the Central Rusyn National Council, the political umbrella organization that was more or less moribund since the early years of Czechoslovak rule. In 1936, the council submitted to the Czechoslovak government a proposal for a “constitution” of autonomous Subcarpathian Rus’. Among other matters, the 54-paragraph proposal reiterated the basic demands that Subcarpathian leaders had been calling for ever since the region had become part of Czechoslovakia in 1919: (1) unification of all villages in Slovakia with a majority Carpatho-Rusyn population with Subcarpathian Rus’ within one year; (2) the creation of a 45-member diet (*Soim*) within six months; (3) the appointment of government officials in the region only from local inhabitants, regardless of nationality; (4) the appointment of a governor, who must be of Carpatho-Rusyn origin, by the president from among

three candidates proposed by the autonomous diet; and (5) the adoption of “Rusyn” as the official language of the province and of the Czechoslovak military forces stationed there. The constitutional proposal, which was issued in two language editions, revealed the unresolved issues between the opposing national orientations; the Ukrainian edition (*Proiekt 1937*) referred to the desired official language as the *mova rus'ka* (*malorus'ka*), while Russian edition (*Zakonoproiekt 1937*) referred to it as the *iazyk russkii*.

The Czechoslovak government basically ignored the Subcarpathian constitutional proposals and instead it adopted in June 1937 a decree (Law No. 172), which was hailed as the “first step” toward implementing autonomy.⁶ The changes in the province’s status were minimal, however, including broadening somewhat the powers of Subcarpathia’s governor and creating a gubernatorial council. In fact, the latter institution was never convened, so that real administrative authority remained, as before, in the hands of the appointed vice-governor (always Czech) and of regional administrators, most of whom were Czechs sent to the province by the central government in Prague. But before this gradualist approach could be carried out, Czechoslovakia itself was overtaken by international events that were to alter profoundly its fate and at the same time have impact on the question of Rusyn autonomy.

In the course of 1938, the leader of Nazi Germany, Adolf Hitler, launched a concerted diplomatic campaign that resulted in the annexation of Austria (March 1938) and the territorial dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. The latter was realized at a meeting in Munich on 29–30 September, where Hitler managed to convince his ally Italy and his adversaries Britain and France of the following: (1) to allow Germany to annex immediately the so-called Sudetenland (parts of Bohemia and Moravia) from Czechoslovakia; (2) to convene another conference that would satisfy Hungary’s territorial claims against Czechoslovakia (in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus’); and (3) to alter the political structure of Czechoslovakia so as to realize the autonomous desires of the country’s two eastern provinces, Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus’.

Once again, as an international crisis was looming in central Europe, Rusyn autonomy became an agenda item (this time of interest to Nazi Germany). Hence, within the framework of a restructured Czechoslovakia, on 9 October 1938, Subcarpathian Rus’ received its first autonomous government⁷ with a three-member cabinet headed by Prime Minister Andrii Brodii. A few weeks later, the Subcarpathian cabinet was dismissed by the Czechoslovak authorities (charging Brodii with pro-Hungarian activities) and replaced with a cabinet headed by Prime Minister Avhustyn Voloshyn.

One of the primary goals of the Voloshyn administration was to prove its loyalty to Czechoslovakia, while at the same time to implement the Ukrainian national orientation in all aspects of Subcarpathian life. Voloshyn and his supporters began to refer to the region as Carpatho-Ukraine (Ukrainian: Karpats’ka Ukraïna) based on their conviction that the local East Slavic inhabitants formed a branch of the Ukrainian nationality. A new Czechoslovak constitutional law (22 November 1938) and other legal decrees provided guarantees for Subcarpathian self-rule, defined the division of power and responsibility with the central government in Prague, and called for elections to a Soim, or regional parliament (Shandor 1997, 67–128). In effect, Czechoslovak promises of autonomy for Subcarpathian Rus’ dating back to 1919 were finally fulfilled two decades later in the wake of the Munich Pact of September 1938.

As it turned out, autonomous Carpatho-Ukraine was only allowed to exist for a few months, since on 15 March 1939 Hitler dismantled what was left of Czechoslovakia. Bohemia and Moravia were incorporated as a joint protectorate into Germany’s Third Reich; Slovakia was allowed to declare its independence as a state closely allied to Nazi

Germany; while Subcarpathian Rus'/Carpatho-Ukraine – after declaring its independence for a symbolic one day, 15 March 1939 – was with Hitler's permission annexed to Hungary.⁸

The Rusyn autonomy question did not go away, however. Those local leaders who favored a return of Hungarian rule (Andrii Brodii, Stepan Fentsyk, and Aleksander Il'nyts'kyi, among others) were awarded with appointments to the Hungarian parliament, where they put forth proposals for an autonomous territory called the Subcarpathian Voivodeship (Hungarian: Kárpátaljai vajdaság) or simply Subcarpathia (Hungarian: Kárpátalja). The proposals were debated but no autonomy was ever implemented by Hungary, which throughout the war referred to the region as the Subcarpathian Territory (Hungarian: Kárpátaljai terület) (Tilkovszky 1967, 145–264; Baran 1999; Botlik 2005b, 44–58; Pushkash 2006, 311–334).

When the Soviet Army arrived in Subcarpathian Rus' in September–October 1944, it soon became clear that Stalin was not going to abide by the wartime agreements with the Allies, which called for the restoration of Czechoslovakia according to its pre-Munich territorial boundaries (i.e. to include Subcarpathian Rus'). Instead, security officers in the Soviet Army together with local Subcarpathian Communist activists organized in Mukachevo on 26 November 1944 the first Congress of People's Committees, which called for the “re-unification” of what was now called Transcarpathian Ukraine/Ukrainian: Zakarpats'ka Ukraïna with its “Soviet Ukrainian motherland,” hence, with the Soviet Union. During the transitional period (October 1944 to June 1945), Transcarpathian Ukraine functioned, in effect, as an “independent” territorial entity governed by decrees issued and implemented by a 17-member National Council/Narodna rada Zakarpats'koï Ukraïny (Pop 2005).

Even before the act of “re-unification” was confirmed by a formal treaty with Czechoslovakia in June 1945, the question of Rusyn autonomy was once again raised, this time with the Soviet authorities. In November 1944, leading figures in the region's Orthodox Church (including the respected Archpriest Aleksei Kabaliuk and the vice chairman of the Transcarpathian National Council Petro Lintur) addressed a petition to Stalin, calling for recognition of an autonomous Carpatho-Russian Soviet Republic (Russian: Karpatorusskaia Sovetskaia Respublika). The proposed Carpatho-Russian Republic was expected to include not only all of Transcarpathia but also territory as far west as the Poprad River near the Tatra Mountains in central Slovakia and as far south as the city of Debrecen in northeastern Hungary.⁹

The petitioners expected that this territory would be joined to the Soviet Union as a distinct entity and not as a part of Soviet Ukraine. The request fell on deaf ears, however, because Moscow ostensibly did not need yet another “republic” within the Soviet fold, let alone one whose proposed borders were to extend well into Slovakia and Hungary. Moreover, the Russophile aspect of the request (Lintur and Kabaliuk believed that Carpatho-Rusyns were a branch of the Russian nationality) did not fit with the official Soviet justification for re-unification, which was based on the “voluntary desire” of the “Transcarpathian Ukrainian people” to “re-unite with their Great Mother, the Soviet Ukraine.”¹⁰

It is also interesting to note that during the period of political transition in 1944–1945, when Transcarpathian Ukraine was de facto neither a part of Czechoslovakia nor a part of the Soviet Union, Carpatho-Rusyns living in immediately adjacent lands reiterated a desire to be part of a united self-governing Carpathian Rus' homeland. Hence, in Slovakia, the representative organ for local Rusyns, called the Ukrainian National Council of the Prešov Region, adopted on 1 March 1945 a resolution which requested the Soviet

government, “when it will resolve the question of Transcarpathian Ukraine, not to forget that in the Prešov Region also live Ukrainians who ... are blood brothers of the Transcarpathian Ukrainians” (Vanat 2001, 39). This overt suggestion to unite the Prešov Region with Soviet Ukraine did not sit well with Slovak leaders (both Communist and non-Communist), and the request was eventually withdrawn.

About the same time, Carpatho-Rusyns in north-central Romania formed in Sighet a national council, which on 4 February 1945 adopted a resolution calling on its delegates to “continue to struggle to unite the Maramureș region with Soviet Ukraine” (Dovhanych, Sheketa, and Delehan 2000, 160). Almost immediately, the Soviet authorities made it known that they were not interested in expanding their country’s borders, even slightly, into the Carpatho-Rusyn-inhabited Maramureș region of Romania.¹¹

Although Soviet policy was opposed to any further border changes with its western neighbors – all of whom were eventually to become fraternal Communist allies – the desire for some kind of autonomy persisted, at least among Carpatho-Rusyns in the Prešov Region of northeastern Slovakia. Within a year of the Communist takeover in Czechoslovakia (February 1948), Carpatho-Rusyn activists submitted two proposals to the new Communist government regarding the issue of autonomy (Bajcura 1967, 109–117). The first proposal (November 1948), formulated by the chairman of the Ukrainian National Council in Prešov, Ivan Rohal’-Il’kiv, called for limited cultural and linguistic guarantees for the “Ukrainian” inhabitants of Slovakia. What those guarantees were would be determined by the Communist authorities of Czechoslovakia. The second proposal (January 1949), submitted by the local Communist party functionary in the town of Humenné, Shtefan Bunganych, called for the creation of a Carpathian Rus’ (Ukrainian) Autonomous Oblast (Karpatoruská [ukrajinská] autonómna oblast) with its own governing structure responsible for educational, cultural, social, health, agricultural, and financial matters. As for the problematic nationality question, Bunganych left open the possibility for the autonomous oblast authorities to decide to associate with the Ukrainian nationality or to develop a distinct East Slavic Carpatho-Rusyn nationality. In the end, Czechoslovakia’s Communist policy-makers rejected any idea of territorial autonomy, and within a few years they accepted the view that the local population was – and should only be – recognized as Ukrainian.

Similar attitudes prevailed among Communist authorities in neighboring Subcarpathian Rus’, which under the name Transcarpathian Ukraine was formally ceded by Czechoslovakia to the Soviet Union in June 1945. For the next half-century (1945–1991), autonomy or any other kind of local political initiative on behalf of Transcarpathia was simply out of the question in the Moscow-dominated centralized Soviet Union. On 1 January 1946, within only a few months of the annexation, the Soviet authorities changed the status and name of Transcarpathian Ukraine (a self-governing entity between November 1944 and June 1945) to Transcarpathian oblast, that is, a region like any other within the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, in the 1970s the region did produce a few political and religious dissidents, some of whom (Iurii Badz’o, Iosyf Terelia) had significance in the larger sphere of the Ukrainian dissident movement. Of more regional interest was the teacher Pavlo Kampov, who, on the 25th anniversary of the “re-unification” of Transcarpathia with the Soviet Union in 1970, wrote under the pseudonym Petro Podkarpats’kyi a political tract entitled, “25 Years of Hope and Disappointment.” That same year he was arrested, put on trial, and accused of calling on his people “to awake from their deep slumber” and to join in the struggle to restore the “republic of Subcarpathian Rus’” and “detach it from the Soviet Union” (Kampov 2001, 130). The immediate arrest and sentencing of Kampov, who was also implicated for being a member of the so-called Party for the

National Renewal of Subcarpathian Rus', nipped in the bud any potential movement for political change. These developments did reveal, however, that ideas about autonomy for Subcarpathian Rus' remained alive even during Soviet times.¹²

In the wake of the enormous political changes that began gradually after 1985 under the Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, the question of Transcarpathian/Subcarpathian autonomy eventually was raised as a public issue. In 1989, when Gorbachev's call for *glasnost* finally reached the peripheral areas of Soviet Ukraine, discussions arose in the Transcarpathian press and in newly formed civic societies about long suppressed topics such as the "true" national identity of Carpatho-Rusyns and the former autonomous status of the region.¹³ The autonomy question was linked to larger discussions throughout Ukraine, namely, would the country become a sovereign or perhaps an independent state? If independent, would it be a unitary state or adopt a federal structure composed of historic regions, each with a large degree of autonomy? In Transcarpathia, the recently founded Society of Carpatho-Rusyns issued in September 1990 a memorandum which called on Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev and the Supreme Soviet of the USSR to transform Transcarpathia into the "autonomous republic of Subcarpathian Rus'" ("Deklaratsiia Tovarystva" 1990; "Declaration" 1991). Within a few months of this announcement the Transcarpathian Regional Council felt obliged to consider the proposal outlined in the memorandum.

Following Ukraine's declaration of independence on 24 August 1991 and the subsequent preparations for a national referendum on that issue and presidential elections to be held on 1 December, discussions about Transcarpathian autonomy intensified. The official newspaper of the Transcarpathian Regional Council, *Novyny Zakarpattia*, ran a series of articles in a column entitled "Independent Ukraine and the Status of Transcarpathia within It." Most of the contributors favored autonomy (Boldyzhar 1991; Hrachak 1991a, 1991b). In October, the Transcarpathian Regional Assembly/Oblasna rada appointed a commission to study the autonomy question (Havrosh 2001; Pipash 2009, 21–32). Headed by the respected Transcarpathian historian, Professor Ivan Hrachak, the commission, taking into account historic precedent and the distinct cultural and economic characteristics of the region, recommended that Transcarpathia should strive to become once again an autonomous entity, but within the new state of Ukraine. At the same time, organizations like the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, which had initiated the demand for autonomy, had all along called for the recognition of their people as a distinct nationality. Consequently, the autonomy issue became as much a matter of ethnolinguistic (i.e. Carpatho-Rusyn national) identity as of Transcarpathian territorial regionalism.

Ten days before the eagerly awaited national referendum, the chairman of Ukraine's parliament (Verkhovna Rada) and presidential candidate, Leonid Kravchuk, arrived in Uzhhorod for consultations with the Transcarpathian National Council. The autonomy question was one of the key items on his agenda. Kravchuk was well aware that since 1990, discussions were raging in the Transcarpathian press about political change, and that there was speculation that the region might be returned to Czechoslovakia where it allegedly experienced a "golden era" during the interwar years of the twentieth century. Moreover, the small but vocal right-wing Republican party in post-Communist Czechoslovakia was openly calling for the "return of Subcarpathian Rus'." The party's leader and Czechoslovak parliamentary deputy Miroslav Sládek even made a well-publicized visit to Transcarpathia where, in the presence of activists from the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns, he raised the Czechoslovak flag. The Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia, whose civic organizations joined with Carpatho-Rusyns in support of autonomy, also wanted their own national autonomous district (*Magyar Autonóm Körzet*) in the southwestern corner of

Transcarpathia, which fueled speculation that the area – or even all of the oblast – might be annexed to Hungary.

In the face of such speculations, Kravchuk proposed what he considered a compromise. He argued that there was to be no further speculation about Transcarpathia's possible future status beyond the borders of Ukraine. Instead, its status would be decided by the response to a supplemental referendum question placed before voters at the same time they would be deciding on Ukrainian independence and casting their vote for the country's president. Kravchuk urged that the politically charged term *autonomy* be replaced with an alleged equivalent but more neutral formulation: "special self-governing administrative territory" (*special'na samovriadna administrativna terytoriia*) (God'mash and God'mash 2008, 486–491). The approved question read:

Do you wish that Transcarpathia, in accordance with the state constitution, acquire the status of a special self-governing administrative territory as a legal subject within independent Ukraine and that it not be included in any other administrative-territorial entity?

Not atypical for any politician running for office was a promise by Kravchuk proclaimed publicly before leaving Transcarpathia: that should the referendum on Transcarpathia's autonomy be approved by the region's inhabitants and should he be elected president of an independent Ukraine, he expected autonomy to be implemented in a few months' time, that is, by the spring of 1992.

On 1 December 1991, Transcarpathia's voters did indeed approve independence for Ukraine (92%); they did favor Kravchuk as the country's president (58%); and they approved the demand for autonomy for their region (78%).¹⁴ And what happened subsequently? Ukraine's independence was demonstrably legitimized in a national referendum and Leonid Kravchuk became Ukraine's president, but Transcarpathia's autonomous status was never implemented. There was, in fact, no shortage of proposals for Transcarpathian autonomy beginning with the "official" one from the Transcarpathian Regional Assembly (calling for a "special self-governing administrative territory") that was submitted to Ukraine's national parliament (Verkhovna Rada) in early 1992. Several other proposals were made public at the same time, which were authorized by the following: a group of pro-Ukrainian intellectuals (calling for a "self-governing Transcarpathia"); the Association of Non-Radical Democrats (calling for a "Subcarpathian Republic within independent Ukraine"); and a group of pro-Rusyn intellectuals (calling for "a special self-governing administrative territory").¹⁵

In the months and years that followed, President Kravchuk blamed Ukraine's national parliament for stalling on the autonomy issue, and it was not long before certain parliamentary deputies (in particular Ukrainian nationalists) and government spokespersons began arguing that the 1 December referendum on Transcarpathia's autonomy was illegal, even though it took place in the context of a referendum on Ukraine's independence and presidential elections which were obviously considered legal. At least one deputy from Transcarpathia (the Communist Ivan Myhovykh) tried to raise the autonomy question in Ukraine's parliament, but was unsuccessful (Myhovykh 2008, 303–307, 310–315).

In the region itself, Carpatho-Rusyn activists petitioned the Ukrainian government about unfulfilled promises regarding autonomy, and to highlight their case in international circles they created in 1993 a "provisional government" for what they called the "republic of Subcarpathian Rus'." The "republic" had its own self-appointed cabinet and prime minister waiting in the wings to take office when Ukraine would allegedly capitulate to its demands or perhaps itself disintegrate as an independent state (God'mash and God'mash 2008, 502). Eventually, the cabinet of the "provisional government" was made public;

its leading figure was the Uzhhorod professor of microbiology, Ivan Turianytsia, as prime minister, and a native of the region resident in Slovakia, Tibor Ondyk, as minister of foreign affairs. Nor did the “provisional government” phenomenon go unnoticed outside Ukraine. Its leaders, especially Professor Turianytsia, were treated with respect and invited to conferences on “democracy-building” held in Denmark (Trier 1999) and were the subject of reports in influential western media organs by authoritative commentators like Timothy Garton Ash (1999). Sometime in 1999 the shadow government dissolved itself as part of a “political” arrangement with local forces supporting then President Leonid Kuchma.

Finally, in December 2007, 16 years after the 1991 referendum on autonomy had been approved by Transcarpathian voters, a civic umbrella organization called the Diet of Subcarpathian Rus’/Soim podkarpats’kŷkh rusynov, headed by the Orthodox priest Dymytrii Sydor, proclaimed its intention to declare Transcarpathia an autonomous territory, regardless of whether Ukraine approved the move. The Soim also called on “the authorities of the European Union and the Russian Federation to guarantee a favorable resolution of the ‘Rusyn question’” (“Deklaratsiia assotsiatsii” 2007).

In early 2008, the Soim was joined by the National Council of Subcarpathian Rusyns (Narodna rada podkarpatskykh rusynov), headed by the physician and Regional Assembly deputy Ievhen Zhupan, and together the two organizations convened in June 2008 the first European Congress of Subcarpathian Rusyns. By the time the second congress met (October 2008), its participants approved a memorandum proclaiming “the renewal of Rusyn statehood [such as it allegedly existed in November 1938] in the form of a Republic of Subcarpathian Rus’,” to take legal effect on 1 December 2008 (“Memorandum 2-ho ... Konhresu” 2008). These latest efforts to achieve autonomy and even statehood for Subcarpathian Rus’ were strongly criticized by pro-Rusyn activists within the region (God’ mash 2008) and beyond, in particular the World Congress of Rusyns, which strongly condemned the Soim and its call to “Russia, which is hardly an appropriate model for Carpatho-Rusyns or any people in Europe” (Magochii and Chepa 2008; Magocsi 2008).

Nevertheless, the extreme if unrealistic declarations did achieve one thing. They attracted attention to the plight of Carpatho-Rusyns in Ukraine in three areas: the international media;¹⁶ government, civic, and intellectual circles in Russia; and eventually the authorities in Ukraine (Rusyn 2007). The Russkii Mir/Russian World Foundation was particularly active, providing two grants totaling nearly 1.8 million rubles (ca. \$77,000) to Dymytrii Sydor, ostensibly for educational and religious projects, and organizing in 2008 and 2009 international conferences at venues in Russia (Rostov-on-Don), Slovakia (Banská Bystrica), and Hungary (Budapest) designed to reveal to the world “the genocide and cultural ethnocide” allegedly carried out by Ukraine against Carpatho-Rusyns.¹⁷ These activities seemed too much even for the otherwise passive Ukrainian government to ignore. Therefore, in June 2009, it initiated a criminal investigation against the head of the ephemeral Diet of Subcarpathian Rus’, Dymytrii Sydor, who after several years in court was found guilty of calling for “the destruction of the territorial integrity of Ukraine” (Rusyn). Although sentenced in 2012 to three years detention, he was never imprisoned, but has been restricted from traveling abroad.

Conclusions

What conclusions might one draw from this discussion of the heritage of autonomy in Carpathian Rus’? The first and most obvious one is that autonomy, or some form of self-government, is nothing new for the region. Rather, it has periodically been an issue of concern ever since 1848; that is, for over a century and a half.

Second, autonomy for the region – most especially for Subcarpathian Rus' – has come to be a normal or acceptable phenomenon. In other words, ever since 1848, whenever there has been a major political upheaval which has threatened to change the political order in central Europe, the various neighboring powers interested in Carpathian Rus', especially that part south of the mountain crests, have accepted the fact that some kind of autonomy or self-rule for the region is something that needs to be theoretically addressed and perhaps practically fulfilled. Hence, in 1918–1919 both Hungary and Czechoslovakia devised their own autonomous options for Subcarpathian Rus'; then again in 1938 Nazi Germany forced Czechoslovakia to implement its previous promises on autonomy, while within a year the returning Hungarian regime justified its annexation in part by promising to institute autonomy. More recently, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the leadership of independent Ukraine also felt obliged to shore up that country's rule over the region by promising to implement autonomy in Transcarpathia by early 1992.

A third conclusion is related to the principles on which autonomy for Carpathian Rus' is based. Beginning with 1848 and continuing at least through the first half of the twentieth century, it was nationality and not territory which remained the legitimizing principle. In other words, it was not a territorial unit, Carpathian Rus', that warranted the status of autonomy, but rather the numerically dominant ethnolinguistic group which inhabited the region, the Carpatho-Rusyns. It is for this reason that the Hungarians named the region in late 1918 *Ruszka Krajna* (the Rus' Land), that the international treaties of 1919 and 1920 deriving from the Paris Peace Conference spoke specifically of the "Ruthenes south of the Carpathians," and that after 1919 Czechoslovakia created a province not called simply Subcarpathia, but Subcarpathian Rus' (*Podkarpatská Rus'*) or the Subcarpathian Rusyn Land (*Země podkarpatoruská*). Put another way, it was a national group being granted autonomy first, after which the territory that encompassed the group's "national" homeland would be defined. In 1991, the future president of Ukraine moved away from the ethnolinguistic to the territorial principle, most likely because Ukrainian society – then and now – finds it difficult to accept the proposition that Carpatho-Rusyns may be a nationality distinct from Ukrainians in the same way that Ukrainians are distinct from Belarusians and Russians.

A fourth conclusion has to do with political experience or readiness for autonomy. For instance, the Czechoslovak government argued after 1919 that it could not implement full autonomy because Carpatho-Rusyns were not yet politically mature enough to take on such a civic responsibility. Similarly, after 1989 Ukrainian critics of autonomy for Transcarpathia also used arguments about the alleged lack of experience among local Carpatho-Rusyns in political matters. Leaving aside the theoretically problematic issue of how and who determines when a given society is, in political terms, sufficiently "mature," the fact is that for well over a century Carpathian Rus' produced individuals who had political experience as parliamentary deputies and governmental administrators during periods of Austro-Hungarian, Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Soviet, and Ukrainian rule. And, ironically, of all the territories within the boundaries of present-day Ukraine, Subcarpathian Rus'/Transcarpathia was the first to obtain a legal and international status with some kind of self-rule – and, moreover, for a period of 20 years (1919–1939).

Readers might expect from this study yet one more conclusion, namely, one that addresses the question of Subcarpathian/Transcarpathian autonomy in the future and the policy course that the government of Ukraine might adopt regarding the matter. Considering the historic developments of the past 150 years, it seems certain that the question of autonomy for Subcarpathian Rus'/Transcarpathia and the related matter of recognizing of Carpatho-Rusyns as a distinct nationality will not go away until they are resolved by the

governing authorities – in this case Ukraine – to the satisfaction of the inhabitants of the region.

In fact, some progress has been made. On 7 March 2007, the Transcarpathian Regional Council passed a resolution (by an overwhelming majority of 71 to 2) that “recognized Rusyns as a nationality on the territory of the Transcarpathian oblast” (*Zakarpats’ka obrlada* 2007). Then, in August 2012, Ukraine’s parliament adopted a law (No. 5029-VI) listing 18 officially recognized “regional or minority languages of Ukraine.” One of the languages on the list is Rusyn. These are, of course, matters of cultural and national identity, not autonomy. But the two have historically been linked in the case of Subcarpathian Rus’/Transcarpathia, and they are likely to remain the subject of debate and in need of resolution especially as the new Ukrainian government grapples with the question of decentralization that has become a political imperative since the Maidan of 2013–2014 and Ukraine’s Revolution of Dignity.

Notes

1. For a general introduction to political developments among Carpatho-Rusyns during this period, see Mel’nikova (1952), Žeguc (1965, 23–52), and Danilak (1972, 157–190).
2. On Dobrians’kyi’s further activity on behalf of enhancing the autonomous status of the Uzhhorod/Rusyn District, see Vergun (1938).
3. On the various Carpatho-Rusyn national councils in Europe and North America and political proposals at the close of the World War I, see Magocsi (1975, 1976).
4. The complex legal relationship of Subcarpathian Rus’ to the rest of the Czechoslovak Republic is discussed in Peška (1934, 2009).
5. The autonomy question in Subcarpathian Rus’ elicited much interest among authors in Poland (Zawadowski 1931); France (Martel 1935); Great Britain (Macartney 1937, 200–250); Italy (Scrialmi 1938); and Germany (Ballreich 1938). During the entire period of Communist rule and Soviet influence in central and eastern Europe (1945–1989), the positive aspect of Subcarpathian Rus’ and its relationship to bourgeois Czechoslovakia was a taboo subject. That relationship was only dealt with by authors living in the West (Walter Hanak, Petro Stercho, Vikentii Shandor, and Paul Robert Magocsi, among others). Since the radically changed political environment after 1989, several monographs have appeared on the subject by scholars working in post-Communist Slovakia (Švorc 1996, 2006; Mosný 2001), the Czech Republic (Shevchenko 2006), Ukraine (Boldyzhari and Mosni 2002), Hungary (Botlik 2005a, 128–243), and Russia (Pushkash 2006, 65–160).
6. The text of the 1937 law and discussion of its implications is found in Peška (1938).
7. The classic studies on the autonomy period (written from a pro-Ukrainian perspective) appeared among emigrés (Stercho 1971, 1995; Shandor 1997). After nearly half-a-century of being dismissed by Soviet Marxist authors as a “fascist” and “puppet-like regime” in the service of the Nazi Germany, in post-1991 independent Ukraine the few months of autonomous Carpatho-Ukraine have become a subject of numerous conferences, public celebrations, and publications (*Vony boronyly Karpats’ku Ukraïnu* 2002; Vegesh 2004; Vegesh and Tokar 2009).
8. The declaration of 15 March 1939, however fleeting, has not only been a subject of positive analysis by scholars in post-Communist Transcarpathia. The day has also been transformed into an occasion for annual anniversary celebrations on a national level, especially during the presidency of Viktor Yushchenko, whereby the region’s “independence” back in 1939 is considered an honorable precursor to Ukraine’s own achievement of independence in 1991.
9. This little known incident was not made public until reported in a local Transcarpathian newspaper in 1995; the full text of the petition was later reproduced (Dovhanych, Sheketa, and Delehan 2000, 45–48).
10. The phrases are drawn from the Manifesto of the First Congress of People’s Committees of Transcarpathian Ukraine, held in Mukachevo, 26 November 1944 (Dovhanych, Sheketa, and Delehan 2000, 70–73).
11. This little known incident concerning post-World War II border issues in the Soviet sphere has only recently been discussed (Vegesh and Horvat 1998, 72–82).

12. As for Kampov, although his sentence beginning in 1970 was commuted in 1977, he was arrested again and re-sentenced in 1981. He was to earn the dubious distinction as one of the last political prisoners released from Soviet incarceration as late as 30 August 1989, that is, well into the Gorbachev era.
13. The debate was touched off with a five-part article (Chuchka 1989) in *Zakarpatskaia pravda*, the official organ of the Transcarpathian regional branch of the Communist party of the Soviet Union, which subsequently ran for one year from August 1990 a popular column entitled, "Ukraine and Rusynism" (*Ukraina i rusynizm*).
14. The voting pattern at the district (raion) level for both referenda and the presidential election is available (*Zakarpattia v etnopolitychnomu vymiri* 2008, 661–662).
15. The full texts of the "official" and alternative proposals are found in the regional newspapers *Novyny Zakarpattia*, 1 February, 22 February, and 27 February 1992; and *Karpats'ka Ukraina*, 20 February 1992.
16. Among the more prominent media examples are Uralov et al. (2008), Johnson (2008), Rud and Kravchuk (2008), Toth (2008), *The Economist* ("Ruthenia" 2009), Hvat' (2009), and numerous Russian, Ukrainian, and British print and Internet media outlets.
17. The conference in Budapest, titled "The Efforts and Problems of Rusyn Self-Determination," included among its participants the influential Russian parliamentary deputy Konstantin Zatulin, together with the editor-in-chief of the Moscow newspaper *Izvestiia*, Vladimir Mamontov.

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