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The Carpatho-Rusyn Movement in the 21st century in North America

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To be precise this essay deals, in the main, with the English speaking parts of North America- there is no known Carpatho-Rusyn activity in either the French or the Spanish areas. We discuss here the Carpatho-Rusyn orientation which sees the East Slavs of the Carpathian Mountains of Central Europe, and their descendants wherever found, as a unique population/ethnic group/nation not dependent on some other entity for its existence¹.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, and even into the 21st century, Russian nationalists identified all East Slavs as Russian, pure and simple, and said that any deviation from that identification was caused by foreign intrigues or the evil desires of perverted leaders. In the 20th and 21st centuries Ukrainian nationalists identified all East Slavs to the south, the west and southwest of Kyiv (as course some distance to the east too) as Ukrainians, pure and simple, and they state that any deviation from that identification was or is caused by foreign intrigues or the evil desires of perverted leaders. Thus many Russians cannot conceive of „Little Russians”/Ukrainians as being anything other than Russian, though, admittedly, of a slightly different flavor. So too, many Ukrainians cannot conceive that many East Slavic inhabitants of the Carpathian region, and their descendants wherever found, have not signed onto the Ukrainian national project. Unfortunately for Russians Ukrainians exist and unfortunately for Ukrainians Carpatho-Rusyns exist.

¹ See *Ethnic Groups of Europe. An Encyclopedia*, ed. J.E. Cole, Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 2011 where 104 European groups are discussed.

Who, then, are the Carpatho-Rusyns? Carpatho-Rusyns are descendants of mountain dwellers of the central part of the northern section of the Carpathian Mountains in the very heart of Europe. As anthropologists and sociologists know, people are born into and are raised in a specific society – a system of language, culture, tradition, religion and historical memory. People who live in and around mountains will have specific features: their crops and animal husbandry, cultural and religious activities and even vocabulary will be different from plains dwellers. This appears to be true world-wide whether we refer to the Swiss in Europe, Tibetans in Asia, the native American Indians in Peru in South America or the Appalachian mountain people in the USA. This, of course, applies to the Carpatho-Rusyns who lived and existed differently from those plains peoples who lived north, south and east of them. This then raises another question, where did these people come from/what is their origin? Are these people a branch of Ukrainians, Russians, Poles, Slovaks or did all these peoples have a common origin? Here we must attempt to part the curtains of history a bit to discuss the Indo-Europeans.

Ever since William Jones announced at an Asiatic Society of Bengal meeting in 1786 his discovery of an „Indo-European“ family of languages there have been attempts to locate the Indo-European homeland, the place from which most European groups came (with the exception of Hungarians, Estonians, Fins and Basques all European groups use some version of an Indo-European language) and many Iranian and Asian Indian groups too. There is a consensus that that homeland was north of the Black Sea, the Caucasus mountains (hence the „Caucasian“ term for “white people”) and the Caspian Sea. After this things get a little misty but one may speculate that the rise of horse riding in the northern part of what is now Kazakhstan allowed horse borne marauders to make lightning raids on settled village inhabitants making the Indo-European homeland untenable. Some Indo-Europeans fled east and south into what is today Iran and India and others ended up in Asia Minor (the Hittites) while others went west and north to Scandinavia to eventually become the base for Germanic nations, the population which would later be identified as Keltic went and others went southwest to become the Albanians, Greeks and the Latin peoples. Where then did the Slavs fetch-up?

As readers of this paper undoubtedly know, the placement of the proto-Slavic homeland is a matter of great scholarly contention. More or less a rather wide consensus finds the proto-Slavs north of the Carpathians in the swamps and wetlands of the headwaters of the San, Wieprz, Bug, Pripet and Dniester rivers and, maybe(?), on the northern side of the northeast arc of the Carpathian Mountains in Central Europe. Certainly the masses of Slavs that flowed south over the Danube into the Balkans in the 6th century to become the „South Slavs“ came from the Carpathian region. At about that time other Slavs moved west along the north side of the Carpathian range

to become the West Slavs in what is now Poland and the Sorbian area of the eastern part of Germany and other Slavs moved along the south side of the Carpathians to become the West Slavic Czechs (Bohemians and Moravians) and Slovaks. The East Slavs arose from proto-Slavs who worked their way east along riverine routes, north of the steppes, into the Finnic and Baltic peoples' zones. The West, South and East Slavs appear to have spun-off of some central point, from in and around the Carpathian mountains. Thus it is possible, as some Carpatho-Rusyns contend, that the Carpatho-Rusyns did not come from somewhere else but that their land is the *Uhrheimat*/original homeland/of all Slavs and they are not a sub-group of some other people- a lost Polish tribe, mountain Russians, a Ukrainian hill tribe- but rather a unique group, aboriginal, autochthonous to their mountain home, perhaps living their 1,000s of years. The counter argument is that Carpatho-Rusyn only came on the historical scene, in written records, in the 13th century and thus must have come from somewhere else. [note the magical appearance of the Romanians about the same time] However the Carpathians were a „no-man's land" back to the Roman times, though traversed by trade routes. A "terra nullius"/no man's land/in the sense that no political entity attempted to control the mountain territory because of fears of the inhabitants – being that they were all witches, warlocks and vampires – and the worthlessness of the land to early medieval lords, which doesn't mean no one lived there. However in the late middle ages the Polish and Hungarian monarchs solidified their rule on the plains and started to extend their claims towards each other – that is, to extend their borders to the mountain peaks between their two countries-and began distributing mountain lands to their vassals. We should mention by monarchial rules the monarch owned all the land that he/she could control despite who had lived on the land for millennia – the autochthonous people had no rights. The vassals then asserted their "rights" by issuing "location" documents to villages and then demanding feudal/serf services – thus serfdom came to the mountains. Later as Austria advanced into the region and Russia approached from the east demands for allegiance to one or another political entity began to be made on the mountain populations.

In the 19th century, those who considered themselves „from here" began to understand that there were larger polities to which they might be force to adhere. Carpathian Rus' was an East Slavic region (East Slavic due to its religion and use of the Cyrillic alphabet) squeezed between West Slavic Poland on the north side (West Slavic due to its Roman rite Catholicism and use of the Latin alphabet) and Hungary on the south (and later Slovakia). To the east was what was conceived of as a savior- whether the Russian Empire, Soviet Union or later an independent Ukraine.

The mass of ethnic Carpatho-Rusyns lost some who went over to Polishness but this was never a great option since up to the present the Carpathian Lemkos (Carpatho-Rusyns on the north side of the highest ridge lines) have been oppressed by the Poles,

whether as landlords in pre-partition times or during the Galician autonomy period (1867-1918) in Austrian times or between the wars or in the post WW II period with en-mass deportations and resettlement. The third Polish Republic, the current state, has not attempted to right the wrongs done to the Lemkos. On the Slovak side of the Polish–Slovak border the best option was to Slovakize since not to do so left the possibility of deportation to the Soviet Union in the post WW II period. Certainly mutual Rusyn–Slovak feelings were better than the Rusyn–Polish ones since both the Rusyns and the Slovaks were under the Hungarian whip while in the north the Poles were the equivalent of the Hungarians for the Rusyn Lemkos. Some Rusyns over the centuries identified themselves with the *Herrenvolk*/the ruling people/in the Hungarian kingdom and Magyarized, as can be seen among Rusyn intellectuals and church leaders up to 1918 (and beyond). Based on the 19th century concept “*hde sukati spasenie/where to find refuge*”/many Rusyns looked to the east, to Imperial Russia. Why couldn’t we be Russian and the Russians will come and save us from the Polish and Hungarian lords. Thus arose Rusophilism (a pan-East Slavic movement) and even „Moscophilism” (the Tsar is our leader and he will save us). The phenomenon of full scale Moscophilism was, oddly enough, founded in North America. In 1794 a Russian Orthodox mission was set-up in Alaska. In 1867 the seat of the missionary bishop was moved to San Francisco, after the purchase of Alaska by the USA, and finally in 1900 to New York City. Why the moves? Well there never were and are not now many ethnic Russian in western North America or North America in general. However beginning in 1880 masses of Slavs: Carpatho-Rusyns, Poles and Ukrainians, were recruited to the burgeoning mines and factories of eastern North America. Maybe half the Rusyns left their mountain homes. In 1893 an immigrant Greek Catholic priest from Presov, Alexis Toth/Alexei Tovt/, who had run afoul of the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Minneapolis, John Ireland, appeared in San Francisco asking admission to the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). Toth had apparently been affected by Moscophile propaganda in Hungary-later in life he revered the Tsar with pictures of the royal family in his parish house in Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania where he spent the last years of his life. He seems to have been a Presov, Hungarian Kingdom, equivalent of Ivan Naumovich of Galicia – both Greek Catholic clergymen who converted to Russian Orthodoxy. The Russian Orthodox bishop of San Francisco saw a golden opportunity. The Carpatho-Rusyns of North America who came from Galicia and Ruthenia in Hungary found themselves in a very foreign environment when they landed, an English-Scottish-Irish-German, Protestant or Roman Rite Catholic dominant country. They were confused and floundered about seeking an anchor/ a refuge. Many found it in rapid assimilation while others eventually rooted themselves in the Ukrainian Greek Catholic for the Galicians and a Byzantine Greek Catholic Church for the Uhro-Rus’ (Hungarian immigrants) or the ROC. Only after WW I did

non-Russian Orthodoxy gain a foot hold, but back to the „golden opportunity”. After all the ROC was a branch of the Tsarist state and followed its foreign policy. Thus to convince the Carpatho-Rusyns that they were really Russians would not only help the Empire’s policy indirectly by establishing a Russian Empire supportive population in the USA but also directly by “communication” between the New Russians and their homeland in Austria-Hungary and by remigration of New Russians to Galicia and Ruthenia (Uhro-Rus’) where support could be built for the eventual annexation of the area by Russia. This would deliver a decisive blow to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, toward which Russia held great enmity since the mid-19th century and the Crimean War. As to the advantages of Carpatho-Rusyn identification with Russia, in the USA, there were many. First, Imperial Russia was an imaged ally of the USA, having stationed Russian ships in New York and San Francisco during the US Civil War (1861-1865). Second, Russia emancipated its serfs about the same time as the US its slaves (1863). Third, Imperial Russia was a Great Power with an enviable culture. Fourth, the liturgical language of the Slavic eastern rite church was Church Slavonic popularly identified as Russian as was anything printed in the Cyrillic alphabet. Fifth, in fact, before WW I the only independent Slavic state of any significance was Russia. Thus since the Carpathian East Slavs used the terms Rus, Rusyn, Rusnak, Ruska, why not just say you were „Russian” when asked what your nationality was and leave it at that!

Further, the Russian state, whether directly by grants from the Tsar’s own budget or indirectly through some government sponsored committee or the Procuracy of the ROC, sent an unknown amount of money to support the missionary activity in North America and to build churches and church supplies were also sent, along with bells and ecclesiastical publications. Salaried missionary priests were also supplied. The analogy in the 21st century is Saudi Arabia which supplies clergy and mosque building donations to foreign countries. Note, until the turn of the 19th to 20th centuries Canada, as a British dominion, was different insofar as Great Britain and Russia were unfriendly in the aftermath of the Crimean War and only when the German threat became clear did Britain and Russia, along with Canada, move to better relations. However not many Carpatho-Rusyns moved to Canada and even of those who did many came eventually into the USA. East Slavic Ukrainians predominated in Canada especially after WW I.

The Ukrainian orientation developed especially among Eastern Galicians and those who slipped over the very porous Austro-Russian border to immigrate through Austria-Hungary to the New World. Some Carpatho-Rusyns were also caught up in the Ukrainian movement. Eventually, if they retained a religious orientation – many did not – in North America then one could find Carpatho-Rusyns in one or another eastern rite churches: Ukrainian Orthodox Church; Ukrainian Autocephalic Orthodox Church; Patriarchial Parishes of the ROC; the Orthodox Church in America (OCA),

the former Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church (the Metropolia), the remnant of the original mission church; the Byzantine Catholic Church; Ukrainian Catholic Church, and the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) - the last of the hard line pre-1918 ROC. Finally there is the Carpatho-Russian Orthodox Greek Catholic Church, founded in 1938, based on a schism in the Byzantine Catholic Church when Latinizing rules were attempted and rejected. Note, the use of the term „Russian”, as far as this writer can figure out, was based on the pan-Rus’ concept- all east Slavs are Rus’/Russian and is not Moscophile in origin since the idea of “ani do Moskvi ani do Rimu/neither to Moscow nor to Rome”/is shown by the fact that this diocese is under the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople

But let us return to the Carpatho-Rusyn movement in the 21st century – where did the movement come from/“hde sukati spasenie/where do some Carpatho-Rusyns find a refuge today? As we have already said many found a base in „Russianness” or among the Ukrainians or even assimilation into the dominant group whether Hungarian, Polish, Slovak or the general American or Canadian concept”. However some Carpatho-Rusyns began, as early as the 19th century, to think along the lines of

[...] why do we need to be poor cousins of some larger group whether Polish (where we are seen as a lost tribe), Ukrainian (where we are treated as some sort of backward/retarded hill people who don’t recognize clearly who we are), Slovak (when we are identified as Greek Catholic Slovaks) or why must we be seen as a “sub-ethnos” of somebody else’s „ethnos”, do we really live in “Western Russia” or “Western Ukraine”, can’t we speak our own language and live in our own homeland where we are aboriginal/ autochthonous? Why must we kow-tow to some other national group?

This feeling developed during the 20th century and has strengthened in the 21st especially after the horrors of the Soviet experience, the rise of the current Russian Mafia-Petro state and the post-Soviet Ukrainian thugocracy. Within the European Union, however, the concept of a Europe of regions and minority rights of the 100+ different groups, including financial support for non-dominant peoples, seems to allow for an opening for a Carpatho-Rusyn orientation. In North America where the state/provincial and federal/national governments generally stay out of ethnic affairs – with the exception of the case of the indigenous native “first peoples” [Indians] – and where individual initiative is encouraged, a non-profit, tax-exempt, non-political, non-partisan movement of Carpatho-Rusyns has developed, as the Russian/Moscophile orientation has collapsed (except for individual cases) and the failure of Ukrainian democracy has become evident leaving those orientations without further support.

While it is true most descendants of Carpatho-Rusyns have assimilated some have decided to support an independent Carpatho-Rusyn orientation and activists can be

found in the Carpatho-Rusyn Consortium of North America which consists of seven organizations:

1. The Lemko Association (LA), Inc. (Lemko Soyuz) was founded in 1929 in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada but its headquarters moved to Cleveland, Ohio and then later to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, New York City and then Yonkers, New York where it stayed for 50 years (1939-1989) then its headquarters moved to Allentown, New Jersey and since 2010 the Lemko Association is in Higganum, Connecticut. Originally a strongly Rusophile, and at times Sovietophile, the organization has evolved into a non-profit, non-partisan organization for furthering Lemko culture and society and the study of Lemko history. While the original name of the Lemko Association included „of the United States and Canada”, in fact the some Canadians set-up, based on the original 1929 Winnipeg organization and personnel, an „Obshestvo Karpatorusskich Kanadtsev/Association of Carpatho-Russian Canadians” – a separation encouraged by the Canadian government, in general, for all cross border organizations, for state reasons. This organization appears to have disappeared in the 1980s to be replaced by “Ob’yednannyya Lemkiv Kanada/ Union of Lemkos of Canada”. The UNited States Lemko Association considers itself one of the inheritors of the Lemko movement which started in Galicia in 1911 and its quarterly, *Karpatska Rus’*, to be the continuation of the original Lemko newspaper published in Lviv, Nowy Sacz and Gorlice 1911-1913 as series I. Series II was the Lemko newspaper published in Cleveland, Philadelphia and New York 1929-1940, series III was the combination of Lemko and *Karpatska Rus’* (begun separately in New York in 1939) where the name was changed to *Karpatska Rus’* but the Lemko numbering was continued. This situation lasted until 2008. In 2010 *Karpatska Rus’/ Carpathian Rus’* was renewed as series IV, as a quarterly. Besides a very considerable archive and artifact collection the LA has a publishing program in progress to put out Carpatho-Rusyn materials in English, the latest publication is a translation and explanation of Ioann Polianskii’s *Istoria Lemkovyny/Lemkovyna: A History...*
2. The Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center (C-RRC) was incorporated in New York in 1978 and is the most active Carpatho-Rusyn entity in North America. It has published 100s of books and for 20 years put out the periodical *The Carpatho-Rusyn American*, a gold mine of information about Rusyns. Additionally associates of the C-RRC include all known scholars in North America who deal with Rusyn issues. The activities of this Center deserve a separate paper-they are too numerous to cover in this short article.
3. The Rusin Association of Minnesota was formed in 1983 in the very location and church where Alexis Toth began the ROC movement. It produces the occasional newsletter, *Trembita*, and takes part in C-R social activities.

The Carpatho-Rusyn Society (C-RS) is by far the largest and most influential C-R organization in North America. It is based in Munhall, Pennsylvania outside Pittsburgh in the old Greek Catholic cathedral building, which had been abandoned when that church organization moved elsewhere. This organization has nearly 2,000 paid up family memberships and it influences thousands more in its outreach, not only in the state of Pennsylvania but also in its chapters which are found in New England and the states of New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Minnesota, Michigan and Arizona. Its headquarters building is being refitted into the national Carpatho-Rusyn cultural and educational center. The C-RS publishes the periodical *The New Rusyn Times*.

5. In Canada there exist also:

- a) The Rusyn Association of North America founded in 1995 in the Toronto area.
- b) The Saskatchewan Ruthnian Society
- c) The World Academy of Rusyn Culture, a basically on-line endeavor.

These organizations receive no government funds and thus must stand on their own financially. In Europe, as undoubtedly readers of this paper know, Carpatho-Rusyns are recognized as a genuine nationality in Poland, Slovakia, Romania, Serbia and Croatia where organizations and publications receive various levels of state support. In Ukraine the Transcarpathian Province/*Zakarpatska Oblast*/ legislature has recognized Rusyns while the national government in Kyiv maintains that Carpatho-Rusyns are a Ukrainian „sub-ethnos” and therefore are not worthy of any special attention.

Carpatho-Rusyns have gathered in World Congresses first in Miedzylaborce in Slovakia in 1991 and every two years thereafter in places like Krynica, Budapest, Ruski Kerestur, Prague and in 2013 the World Congress is scheduled to meet in Munkachevo, Transcarpathian Ukraine. The World Council of Rusyns meets several times a year in various European cities. The principal charge laid against the Carpatho-Rusyn movement is that it seeks its own state and is therefore liable to disrupt European order. Do Rusyns want their own state? It'd be foolish to say that if by some truly extraordinary miracle the gods would offer such a thing Rusyns would turn it down, but in the real world, in real life, it would appear that Carpatho-Rusyns do not need such an independent state in the new European Union where regions and non-state peoples are recognized. In Transcarpathia the desire is to be an autonomous part of Ukraine, as indicated in a referendum in 1993. Of course all North Americans can do, since they are not on the scene in Europe, is to encourage positive developments. Only in Ukraine is there a dark shadow, those in the Ukrainian Transcarpathian province who raise their hands in favor of an autonomous Subcarpathian Province/*Podkarpatska Rus'*, such as Fr. Dimitri Sydor, the Arch Priest of the great Orthodox Cathedral in Uzhgorod who

is under threat of seven years imprisonment for „separatism”, find themselves under pressure to adhere to a Ukrainian unitary/single nationality/ state concept.

Altogether the Carpatho-Rusyn movement does not wish to be under pressure from larger nations, Rusyns wish to be left alone to „sit under their vine and fig tree” and to cultivate their own culture, language, literature, religion and history, just as other peoples are doing both in Europe and North America. The movement exists, the Carpatho-Rusyns exist, much to the consternation of some and the active opposition of others who wish that they would just go away.

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Ruch karpatorusiński w XXI wieku w Ameryce Północnej

Streszczenie

Artykuł podejmuje problematykę ruchu karpatorusińskiego w Ameryce w XXI wieku. Autor przedstawia narodziny i rozwój idei narodowościowej wśród migrantów z Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej. Charakteryzuje funkcjonowanie organizacji przez przybyszów w USA.