

# **INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS IN TRANSCARPATHIAN UKRAINE**

**UZHHOROD, UKRAINE  
4 TO 7 SEPTEMBER 1998**

**ECMI Report # 4  
September 1999**

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**European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)**

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**European Centre for Minority Issues**

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Tom Trier

Uzhhorod, Ukraine  
4-7 September 1998

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## Preface and Acknowledgements

Since its opening in December 1996, the “European Centre for Minority Issues” (ECMI) has organised a series of workshop-type seminars on countries and regions in Europe where inter-ethnic tension and ethnopolitical conflict prevail (Trans-Dniester and Gagausia in Moldova, Russians in Estonia, and Corsica in France). The idea to deal with the Transcarpathian part of the Ukraine also stems from a conference “Minorities in Ukraine”, held in May 1997 by ECMI together with the Baltic Academy in Lübeck-Travemünde (Germany), and attended by some 50 participants, minority representatives and government representatives from various parts of Ukraine. As heated discussions between Transcarpathian Hungarians and Roma on the one side and the Head of the Ukrainian State Committee for Nationalities and Migration on the other clearly demonstrated, not only Crimea, but also the country’s Far West was an ethnopolitical hot spot.<sup>1</sup> This impression was reinforced by a visit of a group of Rusyn activists from all of Carpathian Central Europe to ECMI in November 1997. In January 1998 then, ECMI’s newly appointed Regional Representative for Ukraine, Danish anthropologist Tom Trier, carried out a two-week field trip to Transcarpathia and provided ECMI with an in-depth report on the situation in the region.<sup>2</sup> In particular, he stressed the urgency of the Rusyn problem in Transcarpathia:

“It is apparently only in the Republic of Ukraine that the Rusyns still face a total lack of basic rights as a national group, being deprived of the right to be designated as a distinct nationality. It is hard to ignore the problems of the Rusyns in Ukraine, taking into account that the vast majority of Rusyns in Europe are concentrated in Ukraine’s Transcarpathian region.”<sup>3</sup>

The first ECMI East Central European conference “Inter-Ethnic Relations in Transcarpathian Ukraine” took place at a sanatorium, *Perlina Karpat*, near the town of Mukachevo in the westernmost region of Ukraine, and subsequently in Uzhhorod, the regional capital of the Transcarpathian region, on 4-7 September 1998. The purposes of the conference were:

- to familiarise local minority organisations with recent developments in international and Ukrainian minority legislation and to discuss the implications

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the conference report by Farimah Daftary: “*Minorities in the Ukraine*. An International Colloquium of the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) and the Baltic Academy, Lübeck-Travemünde, Germany, 25-28 May 1997” ([http://www.ecmi.de/activities/ukraine\\_report.htm](http://www.ecmi.de/activities/ukraine_report.htm)).

<sup>2</sup> Tom Trier: “*Minorities in Transcarpathia*. Preliminary Report on the Minority Situation of the Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine.” Ms., Flensburg 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Tom Trier: “Introduction: Rusyns, Minority Rights and the Integration of Europe.” In: Tom Trier (Ed.): *Focus on the Rusyns. International Colloquium on the Rusyns of East Central Europe*. Copenhagen: The Danish Cultural Institute, 1999, p. 3.

for national minorities in Transcarpathian Ukraine;

- to examine the effects of contemporary social and economic issues on local ethnic and minority groups; and
- to agree on general principles governing inter-ethnic relations in Transcarpathian Ukraine.

Among the participants in the conference were representatives from practically all minority organisations officially registered on the regional level in the Transcarpathian region, including Armenian, Czech, Hungarian, Jewish, Polish, Roma, Romanian, Russian, Rusyn, Slovak, and Ukrainian organisations. Representatives from the Ukrainian authorities on national and regional levels also took part in the conference, along with a number of scholars from Uzhhorod State University. Finally, a range of international experts also participated, such as representatives from the OSCE Mission to Ukraine in Kyiv and Simferopol', from the Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, from the Council of Europe in addition to the expert staff of ECMI. The three official languages of the seminar were English, Ukrainian and Russian with the latter being the *lingua franca*.

On behalf of Mr. Hennadii Udovenko, Head of the Standing Committee of Ukraine on Issues of Human Rights, National Minorities and Inter-Ethnic Relations and former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, the Member of the *Verkhovna Rada* (the Parliament of Ukraine) and Professor of Sociology at Uzhhorod State University, Ivan Myhovysh, delivered a welcome address which is included in this report. The ECMI Recommendations based on the proceedings of the conference in its Russian original and in English translation are also appended to the report. Moreover, an important appeal is attached to this report, issued on the occasion of the conference by the cross-ethnic Democratic League of Nationalities of Transcarpathia, which comprises more than 10 minority organisations of the region.

We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of Dr. Randolph Oberschmidt (OSCE Mission to Moldova) and Gizo Grdzeldze (OSCE Mission to Ukraine) who supported the ECMI team during the conference. ECMI is also indebted to Antti Korkeakivi of the Minorities Unit of the Council of Europe, Stefan Vasilev, Adviser to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, and Linnart Mäll of the Unrepresented Peoples and Nations Organisation (UNPO) for contributing with insightful and enlightening contributions to the conference. Thanks goes also to the noted specialist on Transcarpathian affairs, Professor Paul Robert Magocsi, Chair of Ukrainian Studies, University of Toronto, who gave a thought-provoking after-dinner speech on "What Can Europe Learn From

Transcarpathia”. Moreover, we are grateful to the Head of the Transcarpathian Administration, Mr. Ivan Ivancho, for hosting a reception for the international participants prior to the conference which formed an excellent occasion for establishing valuable contacts to the regional authorities.

For the organisational preparations, we strongly thank Lena Shentseva and Ol’ga Tarchinets’ of the Uzhhorod-based Association for Education and Culture Promotion – LIK, who did an excellent job as ECMI’s local partner and who were in charge of the demanding and time-consuming tasks of logistical undertakings and practical organisation of the event. We are equally grateful to ECMI Regional Representative for Ukraine, Tom Trier, who was responsible for setting up the conference on behalf of ECMI and also prepared the present report. ECMI takes full responsibility for this report, which has not been reviewed by the participants. The task of drafting under heavy time pressure a set of ECMI Recommendations was performed by ECMI’s legal expert Kinga Gál and ECMI Senior Analyst Priit Järve. The main burden of planning, preparing and coordinating the conference – as well as simultaneously a similar one on Corsica! – rested on the untiring shoulders of ECMI Research Associate Farimah Daftary. To her go special thanks.

This event on Transcarpathia is proof of the conventional wisdom that at conferences and congresses the important things do not happen at the panels, but in the evening. Thus, Professor Magocsi had taken the initiative to bring about a semi-conspiratory midnight meeting between Leonid Shklyar, Chief Adviser in the Administration of the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Troshchyns’kiy, First Deputy Head of the Ukrainian State Committee for Nationalities and Migration, Ivan Turyanitsa, Chairman of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns and head of the autonomist “Provisional Government of Subcarpathian Rus”<sup>4</sup> — all of them participants at the conference — and representatives of the World Council of Rusyns, among them the Council’s chairman Vasyl’ Turok, to discuss the question of holding the upcoming Rusyn World Congress in Transcarpathian Ukraine. The reactions of the two officials were cautious, though not outright negative. Yet, what in September 1998 seemed to be only a vague hope materialised ten months later: From 24 to 27 June 1999, the Fifth World Congress of Rusyns took place in Uzhhorod — with the blessing of the Ukrainian authorities.<sup>5</sup> With full right, this event can be interpreted as the first step towards a negotiated solution to the “Rusyn problem” in Ukraine. ECMI is grateful — and a bit proud — to have been

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<sup>4</sup> On this body cf. Timothy Garton Ash: “Hail Ruthenia!” In: *The New York Review of Books*, vol. 46, 1999, no. 7 of 22 April 1999, pp. 54-55.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Rusyns want to be recognized as distinct ethnic group within Ukraine. In: *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines*, 28 June 1999, p. 8 (<http://www.rferl.org/newsline/1999/06/280699.html>), and Stefan Troebst: “Autonomiebewegungen im Osteuropa der Nach-’Wende’-Zeit: Mähren-Schlesien, Subkarpaten-Rus’ und Gagausenland.” In: *Osteuropa*, vol. 49, 1999, no. 6 (June) p. 604.



able to contribute to bringing about this important break-through.

A follow up to this first ECMI East Central Europe conference is scheduled to take place in October 1999, organised in co-operation with the Danish Cultural Institute and funded jointly by the Danish Democracy Foundation and the Hermod Lannung Foundation. Some 25-30 representatives from minority organisations in Transcarpathia and representatives of the Ukrainian authorities on regional and national levels will be invited to take part in a Study Visit to Denmark and Germany to achieve a comprehension of democratic instruments for the regulation of minority-state relations. In conjunction with the Study Visit, an international colloquium "Focus on Transcarpathia" on state-minority issues in the region will take place in Copenhagen on 9 October 1999.

Professor Stefan Troebst  
ECMI Director 1996-1998  
Leipzig, Germany, July 1999

## Geographical Location of Transcarpathia



## The Transcarpathian Region

The Transcarpathian Region of Ukraine (*Zakarpatts'ka Oblast'*) constitutes a multi-ethnic and culturally diversified region of East-Central Europe. Today part of the independent Republic of Ukraine, Transcarpathia is located in the westernmost part of the country where the borders of Ukraine meet with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. The indigenous population of the region is constituted by East Slavs (Ukrainians and Rusyns),<sup>6</sup> Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, Germans, Jews and Roma. The East Slavs (Ukrainians/Rusyns), who form the largest portion of the population in ethnic terms, have traditionally inhabited the mountains of the region where they still form the majority of the population. The Hungarians live in the lowlands of the south-west bordering Hungary and Slovakia, while the Romanians are concentrated in several villages in the south-eastern part of the region adjacent to the Romanian border. Slovak villages can be found along the border with Slovakia, while Germans, Jews and Roma are scattered throughout the region.

Although located at the heart of Europe, Transcarpathia is a peripheral and forgotten region. A mountainous area, the territories of what today constitutes the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine, with its limited proportions of habitable land, have always been rather poor. Throughout history, the region has been part of a range of different state formations: Austria-Hungary, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Soviet Ukraine and, lately, the independent republic of Ukraine. The location of the region in a border area is certainly reflected in the ethnic composition of the population, and it is also due to its geographical location that the peoples of the region throughout history have been exposed to a range of different cultural, religious and political influences from both East and West. The fact that the Greek-Catholic (or Uniate) Church – which incorporates elements from the Western (Roman) Catholic as well as the Eastern Orthodox faith – emerged in this area and in neighbouring regions is in itself an expression of the transitional character of the region between East and West.

For more than a thousand years, the present territory of Transcarpathia formed a part of the north-eastern territories of the Hungarian Kingdom. With the defeat of the Austro-Hungarian Empire during World War I, the fate of the region remained undecided until 1920 when the Paris Peace Conference decided on the incorporation of the region into the newly established state of Czechoslovakia under the name of *Subcarpathian Rus'*. Considering the culturally and

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<sup>6</sup> On the issue of the ethno-national divide among the East Slavs of Transcarpathia see page 17ff (The “Rusyn Problem”)

linguistically distinctiveness of the regional population from the Czechs and the Slovaks, *Subcarpathian Rus'* was promised autonomy within the framework of the Czechoslovak state.

In spite of the poverty of the region compared to other parts of Czechoslovakia, the economy was improved through the 1920's and 1930's. In this period, the Rusyn national movement gained momentum and the cultural and political life of the Rusyns experienced a strong growth. In the inter-war period, those Rusyns who identified themselves as Ukrainian nationals were also significant in numbers, and therefore the regional political life was constantly marked by a struggle between these different orientations among the numerically dominant East Slavic part of the population.

Although *Subcarpathian Rus'* initially was promised autonomy within Czechoslovakia after World War I, the central government in Prague was reluctant to fulfil this obligation. However, in 1938 *Subcarpathian Rus'* did achieve autonomy when the state system of Czechoslovakia under pressure from Germany was changed into a federal state. The region was now renamed *Carpatho-Ukraine*, and ruled by its own cabinet. However, following the introduction of autonomy, Hungary occupied the predominantly Hungarian inhabited south-western parts of *Subcarpathian Rus'*. On 15 March 1939, Carpatho-Ukraine, after having held a parliamentary election, declared its independence. However, on the very same day, the Hungarian army invaded the newly proclaimed republic.

The Hungarian occupation lasted until 1944 when the Red Army ousted the Hungarian forces. For almost a year, Subcarpathia functioned as a self-governing entity under the name of *Transcarpathian Ukraine*. Under pressure from the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia signed an agreement in 1945 on the incorporation of the region into the Soviet Union, and in January 1946, Transcarpathia was annexed by the Soviet Union and became an *oblast'* (region) of Soviet Ukraine – incidentally as the very last territory to be included in the USSR. Following annexation, the population was exposed to strong measures of Sovietisation, which continued throughout the post-war era. The cultural and educational life in the region was changed in accordance with the Soviet nationality policy.

The history of inter-ethnic relations is characterised by a high degree of tolerance. Furthermore, the inter-marriage rates, especially between Ukrainians/Rusyns, Hungarians, Slovaks and Germans, have been significant since World War I. Apart from their ethnic identities, many inhabitants strongly identify with their region, which often is considered distinctive from other parts of Ukraine. A relatively high influx of especially Ukrainians and Russians – but also of other ethnic groups –

from other parts of the Soviet Union has further contributed to the ethnic mix of the region.

According to the last census conducted in the Soviet Union in 1989, the ethnic composition of Transcarpathian Ukraine breaks down as follows:

<b>Ethnic origin</b>	<b>Persons</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Ukrainians (incl. Rusyns)	976,749	78.4
Hungarians	155,711	12.5
Russians	49,458	4.0
Romanians	29,458	2.4
Roma	12,131	1.0
Slovaks	7,329	0.6
Germans	3,478	0.3
Jews	2,639	0.2
Belarussians	2,521	0.2
Other groups	6,144	0.4
<b>Total population</b>	<b>1,245,618</b>	<b>100.0</b>

With Gorbachev's introduction of the policy of *perestroika*, national-cultural societies began to form in Transcarpathia. By the end of 1990, nearly all ethnic groups of the region had established their own organisations, many of whom had national minority rights on their agendas. Currently, more than 10 national minorities of Transcarpathia are organised in some 23 national minority organisations. Nearly all of these organisations were represented at the conference.

## **Introduction**

The ECMI conference “Inter-Ethnic Relations in Transcarpathian Ukraine” was officially opened on the evening of 4 September at Hotel Druzhba in Uzhhorod. On 5 September in the morning, local as well as international participants went by coach to a sanatorium, “Perlina Karpat”, located in the Carpathian Mountains some 30 kilometres north of the town of Mukachevo.

The conference, held from 5-7 September, was arranged in four sessions. In the opening session (Session I), international experts provided an overview of international standards on the rights of national minorities. Given that the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities had entered into force in Ukraine on 1 May 1998, ECMI considered it especially important to familiarise the representatives of local minority organisations with this new instrument of the Council of Europe as well as with the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages. The activities of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities were also presented during this session. Finally, a representative of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO) presented this organisation and its activities on behalf of ethnic groups without representation in the United Nations and other international fora.

Session II was dedicated to ethnic relations in Transcarpathian Ukraine from a sociological perspective, while Session III focused on Ukrainian minority legislation and its implications for national minorities in Transcarpathia from the viewpoints of the government representatives at the national and regional levels.

Session IV, on the second day of the conference, concerned Ukrainian minority policy as seen by representatives of the ethnic groups of Transcarpathian Ukraine: Armenians, Czechs, Hungarians, Jews, Poles, Roma, Romanians, Russians, Rusyns, Slovaks and Ukrainians. Each of these sub-sessions began with a short introduction on the situation of the ethnic group in question by local experts and included recommendations on how to improve implementation of minority rights. In the ensuing discussions, all representatives of the invited organisations had the opportunity to present themselves and their concerns.

On the third day, a closing session consisting of two panels was organised on the “Consequences of International and National Legislation for National Minorities in Transcarpathian Ukraine” and “Inter-Ethnic Relations in Transcarpathian Ukraine”. During the panel discussions, the floor was open for general discussion and evaluation of the conference. Also discussed were conditions for the

improvement of inter-ethnic and state-minority relations as well as the adoption of the recommendations.

The present report, while not seeking to provide comprehensive coverage of all aspects of the conference, focuses on a number of key issues. Considering the dual focus of the conference – on the one hand to familiarise the Transcarpathian representatives with international minority legislation, and on the other hand to discuss contemporary problems of the minorities in question – this report mainly addresses the latter objective. At the same time, only the main themes of the conference are discussed, since the purpose of this report is to highlight the major problems pertaining to the current situation for national minorities in Transcarpathia. In addition, the report provides a thematic evaluation of the proceedings of the conference rather than a summary of the speeches and discussions.

In the following, minority participants in the conference will be referred to according to their ethnic affiliation, e.g. ‘a Hungarian minority representative’. Ukrainian officials will be referred to respectively as ‘regional’ or ‘national government representatives’, whereas specialist participants are referred to as ‘local’ or ‘international experts’. Finally, references will be made to ‘Ukrainian civic representatives’ for participants representing non-governmental organisations of ethnic Ukrainians.

Due to the turbulent history of the Transcarpathian Region, the name of the region has changed several times according to the political entities to which the region has belonged. The Hungarians referred to the region as *Kárpátalja*, and in the inter-war years, when the region was part of Czechoslovakia, the region was renamed *Subcarpathian Rus’* (*Podkarpatská Rus*). The name itself is subject to controversies, as those who do not recognise the incorporation of the region into Ukraine continue the usage of the latter term which indicates the location of the region as *under* the Carpathians. The Ukrainian term, *Zakarpatt’ya* (Transcarpathia) implies that the region is located across the Carpathian mountains as seen from mainland Ukraine. In this report, references will be made to the region with the synonymous terms *Transcarpathia*, the *Transcarpathian Region* or *Transcarpathian Ukraine* taking into account the present-day geo-political configuration of the region as part of Ukraine.

## **OPENING ADDRESS**

### **from the Chairman of the Standing Committee of Ukraine on Issues of Human Rights, National Minorities and Inter-Ethnic Relations**

The following address was conveyed to the participants on the first day of the Conference, 5 September 1998, by Professor Ivan Myhovych, Member of the *Verkhovna Rada* (the Parliament of Ukraine), on behalf of Hennadii Udovenko, Head of the Standing Committee of Ukraine on Issues of Human Rights, National Minorities and Inter-Ethnic Relations:

*Dear participants of the conference!*

*I am greeting your scientific meeting, which is being held with the active support of the European Centre for Minority Issues and is dedicated to an important aspect of the social development of Transcarpathia. This region is rich in experience of peaceful co-existence of the representatives of more than 70 ethnic groups who historically have lived here, in the centre of Europe. I hope that the understanding of this and analysis of the present realities will help to improve the state legislation and national policy of Ukraine, and will enrich the science and social practice of all the European community with new ideas and approaches.*

*I wish you a vigorous, creative and fruitful work!*

*H. Udovenko*

*Head of the Standing Committee of Ukraine on Issues of Human Rights,  
National Minorities and Inter-Ethnic Relations*



## Minority Legislation and Implementation

The conference's sessions on international and Ukrainian minority legislation triggered an interesting debate on legislation versus implementation. The rights of national minorities of Ukraine are stipulated in several legislative acts. Even before Ukrainian independence in 1991, the *Declaration on the State Sovereignty of Ukraine*, adopted by the Ukrainian Supreme Soviet in July 1990, guaranteed all ethnic groups residing in the territory of the republic the right to "national-cultural development". Also, the *Law on Languages* of October 1989 and the *Law on Citizenship* of October 1991 both had relatively liberal provisions for ethnic non-Ukrainians. In November 1991, one month prior to the referendum on the independence of Ukraine, a *Declaration of the Rights of Nationalities in Ukraine* was adopted by the parliament in an attempt to guarantee Ukraine's minorities the protection of their rights after independence. On 1 December 1991 the majority of Ukraine's population voted in favour of an independent Ukraine.

In June 1992, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted the *Law on National Minorities*, which codified a substantial number of the articles of the Declaration of the Rights of Nationalities with a few additions. The law, *inter alia*, guarantees all national minorities the right to learn and use their native language, to receive instruction in their native language in state schools, to organise cultural associations, to use national symbols, to practice their religion, to create cultural and educational institutions, and to satisfy their needs in literature, art and mass media.

*The Law on National Minorities was adopted in 1992*

Ukraine completed its constitution in June 1996, being the last country to do so in the former Soviet Union. The Constitution stipulates that the Ukrainian language is the only state language in Ukraine. The Constitution also guarantees the free development, use and protection of Russian and other languages of national minorities in Ukraine (Article 10). Emphasising the state's role in the consolidation and development of the Ukrainian nation, the Constitution also secures the development of the "ethnic, cultural, language and religious originality of all native peoples and national minorities of Ukraine" (Article 11).

Ukraine's treatment of national minorities was praised as generally tolerant and democratic in an international context, especially in the first years following Ukrainian independence. This perception was partly due to the comprehensive protective legislation on minority issues, such as the 1991 Declaration and the 1992 Law on National Minorities, but also due to the bilateral agreements between Ukraine and Hungary on the protection of the Hungarian minority in

Transcarpathia. During the last few years, however, it has become increasingly apparent that there is a certain gap between the legislation and the implementation of the protective measures of national minorities in Ukraine.

In an international framework, Ukraine was the first country of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to join the Council of Europe. Ukraine signed the Council of Europe *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (1995) as early as September 1995. The Framework Convention was ratified by Ukraine in January 1998, and entered into force on 1 May that year. During the conference, special attention was given to the Framework Convention and the degree to which Ukraine can be expected to live up to the stipulations of this first legally binding convention on the rights of national minorities.

During the debate that followed the presentations on Ukrainian and international legislation in the field of national minorities, a Russian minority representative said that before the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 there was no need to defend the interests of national minorities in Transcarpathia. Inter-ethnic relations were characterised by tolerance. She also said that Transcarpathia has always been an example of inter-ethnic accord and a model for the peaceful co-existence of many ethnic groups.

A government representative stressed that today Ukraine has solved all problems of minority legislation. In the fairly comprehensive legislation, the government has

<i>A gap between legislation and its implementation</i>
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considered the status of the various groups: ethnic minority, national minority, indigenous population, etc. He admitted, however, that some problems remain to be solved with regard to the implementation of the laws. The government representative noted that even in the most democratic states, problems always occur. What is important is that all parties be prepared to enter into a constructive dialogue on appropriate solutions.

Expressing satisfaction with the legislation on national minorities in general, a Hungarian minority representative noted that there is a wide gap between the legislative stipulations and actual implementation. He stated that government policy towards minorities is rather stable and pointed out that problems in state-minority relations are to some extent exacerbated by nationalists of various groups who invoke history instead of trying to solve problems in the fields of inter-ethnic and state-minority relations.

A Rusyn minority representative said that, based on his experience as belonging to a non-recognised minority, he considered the Ukrainian minority legislation purely

declarative. Undoubtedly, he said, the Ukrainian government is favourably inclined towards integration with Europe. Nevertheless, despite the participation of Ukraine in the international framework of European institutions, such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE and others, virtually nothing is being done to approach the problems of national minorities in Ukraine, and especially not the problems of the Rusyns of the Transcarpathian region. In reality, the Ukrainian authorities continue the Soviet policy of double standards, he argued. In short, he said that he perceived Ukrainian policy towards national minorities, and particularly towards Rusyns, as undemocratic and inhuman.

An international expert concluded the discussion on legal issues by noting that, in his view, there seems to be general satisfaction with the laws. International attention to the problems of Ukraine is increasing and the value of a comprehensive and coherent legislation, on the national as well as international levels, should not be underestimated, he said. Only on the basis of a sound legislation can a satisfactory minority policy be conducted. He said that the second stage for the improvement of minority rights pertains to the norms for implementation. The international community does not have any ready-made models for implementation. Each country must find its own model, which may be inspired by other countries. As long as the model is within the framework of respect for human rights, there is a good chance that the model will work.

## The “Rusyn Problem”

The most controversial and spirited discussion during the conference pertained to the “Rusyn problem”. Considered a regional branch of the Ukrainian nation, the Rusyn population of Transcarpathia does not enjoy official recognition as a national minority in Ukraine, in contrast to other countries where Rusyns live, such as Slovakia, Poland, Hungary and Yugoslavia. During the inter-war years, while Transcarpathia was part of Czechoslovakia, Rusyns enjoyed all rights as a national minority with a significant number of Rusyn schools, newspapers as well as cultural and political institutions. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the “Rusyn problem” was vigorously debated, and the East Slavic indigenous population of the region was divided among various national orientations. However, after the inclusion of the region into Soviet Ukraine in 1946, the Rusyn ethnic affiliation was officially banned and the East Slavic population of Transcarpathia declared to be Ukrainians. With the political changes beginning in 1989, Rusyn organisations have again emerged, calling for recognition of the Rusyns as a distinct ethnic group and for collective human rights. Such demands have not been viewed positively by the central authorities of now independent Ukraine, especially due to fear of a spread of secessionist tendencies in the region.

Emphasising the Rusyns’ affiliation with the larger Ukrainian nation, the East Slavs of Transcarpathia are most often designated with the hyphenated form “Rusyn-Ukrainians” to the regret of many Rusyn activists. A Rusyn representative stated that the Rusyns rather than the Ukrainians constitute the titular nation in Transcarpathia, since they constitute the indigenous East Slavic population and – despite migration of Ukrainians and Russians to Transcarpathia during the Soviet era – form the overwhelming majority of the region’s inhabitants today. The Rusyns of *Subcarpathian Rus*’ are not a minority but a majority, he said, and ironically added that he would prefer the Rusyns not be designated “Rusyn-Ukrainians”, as is done by the authorities and many Ukrainians, but rather as “Rusyns-not-Ukrainians”.

“Rusyn-Ukrainians”, or “Rusyns-not-Ukrainians”
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A local expert stated that Transcarpathia is a special region, having been part of a range of political state formations. He said that this fact had contributed to the development of a general tolerance among the inhabitants of Transcarpathia. He noted that, although Transcarpathia is part of Ukraine, there are many ethnic groups other than Ukrainians living in the region, including the Rusyns, and said that people living in the region should be proud of Transcarpathia’s cultural and ethnic diversity. Today, he stated, there are three titular nations in Transcarpathia: the Ukrainians, the Rusyns and the Hungarians. Responding to this statement,

another local expert said that such proclamations on who constitutes a titular nation are dangerous. If Russians, for example, have arrived in the area later than others it does not mean that they have fewer rights than other groups in the region.

Speaking on the divide among the Rusyns of different ethno-national orientations, a local scholar addressed the question from the point of view of history. The question of Rusyn versus Ukrainian self-ascription dates back to the nineteenth century, he explained. Between the World Wars, this issue was vigorously debated

*Reluctant return to  
a banned debate*

but with the annexation of the region into the Soviet Union and the abolition of a Rusyn ethnic affiliation, the nationality debate was closed. Rusyns were considered to be Ukrainians during the Soviet system and it was only in 1989 with *perestroika* and the subsequent demise of Soviet power that the debate resurfaced. Since then, a heated and sometimes aggressive debate has raged on this issue, he said. Welcoming the conference as an opportunity to conduct a constructive dialogue on the issue, the local expert encouraged the participants to enter into an open-minded discussion. He recalled that, during the 1990s, numerous attempts had been made to bring the conflicting parties together for a discussion on the question, most often in vain. Recently, Uzhhorod State University had organised a conference precisely on the Rusyn problem, but many scholars did not take part in the discussions – a fact which he interpreted as a lack of will to come to terms with the issue.

A Ukrainian civic representative argued that the Rusyn question is not an expression of an *inter-ethnic* conflict but merely an *intra-ethnic* conflict. He recalled the nineteenth century division of the region's Slavic population into a Russian, a Ukrainian and a Hungarian orientation respectively. He called for respect for those local Ukrainians who have chosen to designate themselves as Rusyns, but also encouraged those Rusyns to respect their kinsmen's free choice to

*Inter-ethnic,  
or  
intra-ethnic conflict ?*

call themselves Ukrainians, if they so wished. The Ukrainian representative argued, however, that all Rusyns are basically Ukrainians. For specialists on ethno-national issues, it is beyond any doubt that Rusyns constitute an ethnic sub-group of the Ukrainian nation, he continued. It would therefore be a great mistake if the government began to support "political Rusynism", that is attempts to separate from the Ukrainians, to establish "Rusyn schools", "Rusyn autonomy", etc., whereas he did not consider it harmful to support Rusyn cultural activities such as concerts and folk festivals since such activities are merely cultural manifestations of a regional sub-group of Ukrainians, the Ukrainian representative said.

A government representative emphasised that the Republic of Ukraine has signed

and ratified the Council of Europe *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* without reservations, unlike some other European countries. He argued that the question of defining minorities is a scientific discussion and went on to address the question of what the reactions would be if the inhabitants of Odessa claimed to be ethnic Odessans or if the inhabitants of Berehovo/Beregszász<sup>7</sup> began to designate themselves as Transcarpathians. Would that make them eligible for being considered national minorities? He noted that the Republic of Ukraine is rather clear on this question. In the Article 3 of the *Law on National Minorities* national minorities are defined as groups of Ukrainian citizens which are not ethnic Ukrainians, but show feeling of national self-awareness and affinity. To consider a group a national minority, the group in question must comprise a core population in Ukraine. He added that the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences will deal with the issue of whether or not the Rusyns are a nation.

A Rusyn minority representative replied that it is an obvious fact that the Rusyns constitute a nation in their own right, not an ethnic sub-group of Ukrainians. The government representative asked for scientific evidence for this statement and added that such allegations remained to be verified.

An international expert argued that the discussion on who is a minority and who is not should not be left to scientists. He referred to the fact that, in the nineteenth century, German scholars did not recognise Luxemburgers, and even today several scholars do not recognise Macedonians as a national group, though they have a state of their own. As a third example, he mentioned the Scanians of southern Sweden, who are not recognised as a distinct ethnic group by the majority of Swedish specialists. The status of an ethnic group is a question of the “will of nations”. In such matters, he said, it is not reasonable to wait for the decision of a state or a decision taken by scientists.

*Who should  
decide who is a  
minority?*

The government representative replied that he considered the question of who is a nation rather evident and stressed that he approached the Rusyns as an ethnic sub-group of the Ukrainian nation, which in theory can develop into a separate nation. This, however, has not taken place at this stage in history, he said.

A local expert noted that discussion on the status of the Rusyns is an “office discussion” and if one talks to people in the villages, a completely different picture will emerge. They consider themselves to be Rusyns as a matter of greatest

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<sup>7</sup> Berehovo/Beregszász are both official names (in Ukrainian and Hungarian), a symbolic outcome of Hungarian minority efforts, for the town and district in Transcarpathia, with a large percentage of resident Hungarians.

obviousness, he said. Catching up on this argument, another local expert stated that the indigenous East Slavs of Transcarpathia have traditionally had a weak sense of ethno-national identity and are characterised by a wide degree of tolerance. He argued that the Rusyns constitute an ethnic buffer in Transcarpathia between East Slavs (Russians, Ukrainians) on the one hand and West Slavs (Slovaks, Czechs, Poles), as well as Germans and Hungarians on the other, hereby ensuring the ethno-national balance between “East” and “West”. According to his sociological research, the number of indigenous East Slavs in Transcarpathia identifying themselves as Rusyns has been growing steadily since 1990. Although the number of people who consider themselves Transcarpathians, i.e. basing their identity on a region rather than ethnicity, has increased simultaneously, the “ethnic distance” between the various nationalities of Transcarpathia is on the rise, and this may eventually jeopardise the ethnic tolerance of the region. In this process of transformation, he argued, Rusyns have attained dominant status at the expense of the Ukrainians.

*Rusyns as an ethnic buffer in Transcarpathia*

A Rusyn minority representative said he considered it to be intolerable to allow governments of nation-states to define the notion of “minority”. Such an approach violates the citizen’s right to self-identification, he said. An international expert added that, according to international legal standards, states should abstain from defining national minorities. He admitted that the *Framework Convention*, which has been formulated rather vaguely, does not provide any definition of the notion of “national minority”. This fact may be interpreted by states as if they are entitled to define their own national minorities. However, from the viewpoint of the Council of Europe, the lack of clear-cut definitions does not imply that states are entitled to ignore claims from groups who consider themselves national minorities, he said.

Another Rusyn representative said that, since the inclusion of the region into the Soviet Union in 1946, an ethnocide of the Rusyn nation has taken place. He considered this inclusion a clear-cut annexation, which was followed by a ban not only on the Rusyn national identity but also on the traditional faith of the Rusyns – Greek Catholicism. Moreover, he stressed, Rusyn schools were either closed or transformed into Ukrainian schools and civic and cultural Rusyn organisations were prohibited. This policy of totalitarianism and ethnocide, he stated, continues until today. Ukraine has become independent, repudiated communist totalitarianism, and has proclaimed itself a democratic state. He emphasised that in spite of this fact no steps towards creating a democratic *Subcarpathian Rus’* have been taken. He continued that Ukraine not only violates

*“...the policy of totalitarianism and ethnocide continues”*

the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, the *Framework Convention* and other international legislation on national minorities, but also its own Constitution, not to mention its Law on National Minorities. To execute its ominous plans, he argued, Ukraine is fabricating a new historiography in which Rusyns have no place. Accordingly, he stated that Rusyns have no opportunities to teach their children their language, no access to radio and television, no material or legitimate support from the authorities for the revival and development of their spiritual life and culture. Finally, the Rusyn representative appealed to the Ukrainian authorities to stop regarding the Rusyns as Ukrainians, which, in his opinion, is a gross violation of the Rusyns' basic human rights.

As a reply to this statement, a government representative asked the Rusyn minority representative if he considered the policy towards Rusyns today to be similar to that of the Soviet era. The Rusyn minority representative answered that both parties should recognise each other. If people state they are Ukrainians, we respect them, he said. The Rusyn participant insisted that he could not see any difference between the present policy of Ukraine towards Rusyns and the policy practised during Soviet times.

The government representative responded that, just to mention one major difference, under the Soviet Union, Rusyn representatives would not have been allowed to express freely their point of view on these issues. He also emphasised that the regional authorities are not repressive towards Rusyns. Since the independence of Ukraine, Rusyns have already organised three cultural festivals, such as the 1997 summer Rusyn festival in Mukachevo, which enjoyed the support of the regional administration. Moreover, representatives of Rusyn organisations are free to participate in international gatherings on political issues, including conferences on minority rights.

A representative of the regional administration added that in Transcarpathia everybody is absolutely free to identify themselves as they wish. He noted that this principle will be reflected in the new questionnaire to be used in conjunction with the first census of Ukraine since the 1989 USSR census and scheduled to take place in January 1999.<sup>8</sup> This questionnaire contains no set categories of ethnic origin and the respondents can fill in the form with whatever ethnic identity they wish, he explained.

*“Everybody is free to identify themselves as they wish”*

A Rusyn representative expressed the fear that, although a significant number of Rusyns would be identified as such in the forthcoming census, Rusyns might still

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<sup>8</sup> By the time of writing the census has been postponed to 2001.



be regarded as a sub-ethnos of the Ukrainian nation. Moreover, he stressed, although Rusyns are one nation, Rusyns refer to themselves using a variety of ethnonyms, such as Rusyns, Carpatho-Rusyns, Rusnaks, Lemkos, Bojkos, Hutsuls, or sometimes even Russians. In spite of the different self-designations, he argued, they all speak the same mother tongue, Rusyn, which is entirely different from Ukrainian. He also expressed the concern that the census takers, or subsequently, the census analysts, would interpret designations such as Rusnaks and Hutsuls as Ukrainians and not as Rusyns.

An international expert noted that the gap between the actual ethnic identification and the identifications offered in Ukraine seems to be growing. Concerning the new census registration system based on questionnaires without fixed categories of

*A gap between  
actual and official  
ethnic identification*

ethnic origin, he expressed his concern on how “statistically disturbing” ethnic self-designations would be interpreted when the results of the census are counted. Would small groups be included as such or simply left out in the results? He also addressed the risk of census takers asking rhetoric questions. To ensure the quality of the census, he suggested that it be conducted, and the results counted, with the participation of representatives of non-governmental organisations, including minority organisations and perhaps international observers, similarly to procedures for national election monitoring.

A national government representative replied that, in general, Ukraine has shown itself capable of conducting elections without manipulation or falsification. Although minor episodes of ballot-rigging have occurred, elections held so far in independent Ukraine have been fair and just, he emphasised. Consequently, he saw no particular need for conducting the census with the participation of international observers.

Referring to a number of examples of electoral fraud during the March 1998 national election, a Rusyn representative underlined the importance of transparency in connection with the census. He also said that when a number of Rusyns have been officially counted by the census, and the existence of a Rusyn nationality thereby proven, the authorities must also take appropriate action to implement minority rights for the Rusyns.

Another Rusyn speaker said that he seriously doubted the good intentions of the forthcoming census. He noted that, in his opinion, there was sufficient evidence to indicate that Ukrainian authorities are deliberately trying to assimilate the Rusyns. He said that attempts at forcible assimilation are particularly evident from what he termed a racist and disgraceful chauvinistic programme, the so-called “Plan of

Measures to Solve the Ukrainian-Rusyn problem”, a classified document adopted by the State Committee of Ukraine on Nationalities and Migration in October 1996 and confirmed by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine. According to this plan, activists who are striving to restore the Rusyn nation and to bring about autonomy can be prosecuted for their activities. Overall, the plan provides ten measures to be implemented by various administrative and scientific departments for the assimilation of the Rusyns. He encouraged Ukrainian authorities to apologise publicly for outlining what he termed a criminal plan and not to carry out the stipulated steps to assimilate the Rusyn population.

A government representative replied that the plan referred to is not classified. The Ukrainian Academy of Sciences will deal with the issue of whether the Rusyns are a nation or not, he repeated, and emphasised that he was not aware of other instructions to deal with the Rusyns. He also denied that the Ukrainian government is trying to assimilate the Rusyns.

A Ukrainian civic representative said that certain groups with representatives in Russia, USA and Canada are throwing dirt on Ukraine and are trying to damage the reputation of Ukraine internationally. Also, certain leading figures in Transcarpathia have an interest in destabilising Ukraine, he claimed. He said that the citizens of Transcarpathia have to take this threat seriously if they want to avoid another Bosnia-Herzegovina or Kosovo. He also appealed to the international experts not to interfere in the internal problems of Ukraine.

*“We don’t want a new Kosovo in Transcarpathia...”*

An international expert replied that it is inappropriate to compare Transcarpathia with Bosnia-Herzegovina or Kosovo. Transcarpathia is far from being in such a situation. A local expert added that the Transcarpathian population is extremely tolerant. For a thousand years, Hungarians have lived shoulder to shoulder with Rusyns, Ukrainians, Romanians, Slovaks and other ethnic groups in an atmosphere of peace and co-operation, without animosities, he said. All the people of Transcarpathia preserve their traditions, exchange the results of their work, and enrich each other through the experience of material production and spiritual life, he continued and noted that throughout history various political regimes have tried to “renationalise” the population through policies of “Magyarisation”, “Czechification”, “Russification” or “Ukrainisation”. Nevertheless, the peoples of Transcarpathia have survived, still constituting a multi-ethnic population.

A Rusyn representative replied to the Ukrainian speaker that his and other Rusyn organisations are not para-military units, as one might mistakenly understand when listening to the Ukrainian civic representative. He said that the Rusyns are a

civilised people, who do not encourage inter-ethnic conflict. Rusyns are in fact ensuring the ethnic balance in the region, he said with reference to the speaker who previously had characterised the Rusyns as an “ethnic buffer” between Eastern and Western groups.

A regional government representative replied that all people have rights as well as obligations. He stressed that he saw no need to help people who do not contribute in a constructive way to improve society, such as some of the Rusyn representatives present at the conference. There is no reason to support so-called nationalities who are not legal and not registered, and who are promoted by certain individuals with their own personal agendas, he said.

A Rusyn representative replied that Rusyn activists are not disobedient citizens but respect the Ukrainian state and Constitution. The problem is that many laws do not function in practice. He emphasised the need for the implementation of the laws, noting that the majority of these problems could have been solved if a round-table forum had existed. Certainly, he amended, a round-table would not have solved the economic problems but much can be achieved with a dialogue between the government and minorities.

A local expert said that minority rights cost money and added that, in his opinion, the recognition of the Rusyns would not be a problem if Ukraine were a wealthy country. This viewpoint was strongly opposed by a Rusyn speaker, who said that the main reason for the Ukrainian government’s fear of recognising the Rusyns as a distinct ethnic group was the perspective of possible Rusyn demands for their autonomous republic.

Speaking about what he termed “political Rusynism”, a government representative criticised certain Rusyn activists for what he viewed as their intolerable activities within the so-called “Provisional Government of Subcarpathian Rus’ ”. The very existence of this “government,” formed in 1993 as a self-proclaimed administration of “a sovereign Subcarpathian Rus’ ”, was offensive to the spirit of the Ukrainian Constitution and constituted a major obstacle to a dialogue between the authorities and the Rusyn activists, the government representative stressed.

Upon request of the Rusyn participants, a special meeting was set up during the conference on the issue of the forthcoming Fifth Rusyn World Congress, to be held in Uzhhorod in the early summer of 1999. The inter-regional Rusyn movement, established in 1991 and uniting Rusyn organisations in five European countries, have so far held their biannual congresses in Slovakia, Poland,

*The problem of the World  
Congress of Rusyns*

Yugoslavia and Hungary, and therefore wished to hold the forthcoming congress in Uzhhorod, in the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine. At the time of the conference, however, discussions between Rusyn representatives and the regional authorities of Transcarpathia had not yielded any concrete results on the issue. Consequently, the Rusyn representatives wished to take the opportunity to discuss the question with the representatives of the Ukrainian authorities at a closed meeting during the conference. Apart from representatives from the Rusyn organisations in Transcarpathia, delegates representing the international *World Council of Rusyns* were also present, as well as international experts from the Council of Europe, the OSCE and ECMI.

During the meeting, it was agreed that the Ukrainian authorities would view the possibility of holding the Congress in Spring 1999 with a positive attitude on the condition that certain Rusyn organisations would cease their activities within the “Provisional Government of Subcarpathian Rus’ ”.

## The Autonomy Question

On 1 December 1991, a countrywide referendum was held in Ukraine on the future political-administrative status of the then Soviet Socialist Republic. With the great majority of Ukraine's population voting in favour of independence, the referendum legitimised the declaration of independence of Ukraine that had been adopted in September that same year.

In the Transcarpathian Region, an additional referendum took place simultaneously concerning the issue of self-rule for the Transcarpathian Region, and 78% of the population voted in favour of provisions for self-rule. Additionally, in the predominantly Hungarian Berehovo/Beregszász District near the Hungarian border, voters were asked if they supported local self-rule on the district level. Here, 81.4% of eligible voters were for the creation of a Hungarian National Autonomous District.

*The referenda of 1991  
on autonomy*

Since 1991, however, little has been done with regard to the practical implementation of autonomy. In May 1993, the *Oblastna Rada* (the Regional Parliament) in Uzhhorod adopted a resolution addressed to the central Ukrainian authorities demanding implementation of regional autonomy in accordance with the results of the 1991 referendum. In spite of this and other local and regional steps taken to enforce the results of the referenda, the central government in Kyiv has not implemented autonomy on either the regional or local levels.

A Rusyn speaker at the conference offered a historically based introduction to what he considered the firm desire of Transcarpathia's peoples: autonomy for the Transcarpathian region. In the inter-war years, the Transcarpathian region, under the name of Subcarpathia, belonged to Czechoslovakia. In 1938 the Subcarpathian region obtained status as an autonomous republic within Czechoslovakia, and in March 1939 declared its independence under the name of Carpatho-Ukraine. Independence, however, was short-lived as the Hungarian army occupied Subcarpathia immediately after the proclamation of independence. With Hungary's defeat in World War II, Subcarpathia came under Soviet military control in October 1944. From this moment until January 1946, the region, now called Transcarpathian Ukraine, developed its own legislation and acquired all the attributes of an independent state in preparation for joining the Soviet Union as a state of its own right, and not merely as a region of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. In June 1945, however, the foreign minister of Czechoslovakia, after strong pressure from the Soviet Government, signed an agreement with the USSR according to

*Transcarpathia  
has been an  
autonomy*

which Czechoslovakia agreed to cede Transcarpathian Ukraine to the USSR. An agreement between two states concerning a third state is invalid by all international norms, the speaker said. Clearly, in his opinion, after the fall of totalitarian Communist rule, to reconsider the legal-administrative status of Transcarpathia should be perceived as an obvious right of the people of Transcarpathia.

Approaching the autonomy issue from a different angle, another Rusyn minority representative stated that former Ukrainian president, Leonid Kravchuk, prior to the 1991 referendum on self-rule, clearly stated that the Rusyns constitute a people and that they would be granted autonomy. After the elections, however, he had apparently forgotten this promise. Also, the present head of state, Leonid Kuchma, before being elected president in 1994, addressed the Rusyns amongst other peoples in Ukraine on the perspectives of granting Transcarpathia autonomy. Nevertheless, to this date, the Rusyns had not been recognised as a national group, nor had Transcarpathia obtained self-rule of any kind. The representative considered this policy of promises without implementation to be a dangerous political game, which would inevitably lead to enforcement of tensions between the population of Transcarpathia and the central government. He therefore appealed to the authorities to take seriously the demands for autonomy.

A Rusyn minority representative addressed a question to the international experts on the legal status of peoples whose territories in the course of history have been annexed by other states. Responding to this question, an international expert noted that the international community has to consider each case in its own context, since there are no universal formulas for autonomy issues. The expert referred to the

*Who should live  
in a future  
Rusyn state?*

current situation in the Crimea, where Crimean Tatars claim to be the indigenous population. Others may argue, however, that the Greeks are even more indigenous. It is always dangerous to ask the “who-came-first” question, he stressed. The expert then raised the hypothetical question of who should live in a future Rusyn state. If everybody agrees on that issue, there is no problem. But if they do not, serious problems may occur. Will such an entity be exclusively for Rusyns or also for other peoples living in Transcarpathia, influenced by Rusyn state-building, he asked. The expert stressed that it is necessary to halt discrimination towards the Rusyns only through negotiations with the Ukrainian authorities. The expert also posed the question of why it is so important to obtain statehood. The decision on self-determination should be a balanced act.

The Rusyn speaker replied that Ukrainian authorities neglect the will of the Transcarpathian citizens by oppressing the voices for autonomy. He emphasised that he would like Transcarpathia to remain part of Ukraine but stressed the

appeals for implementation of what he, referring to the 1991 referendum, considered the legitimate autonomy of the region. A local expert added that the Rusyns have always been loyal to the states to which they have belonged and belong today, and emphasised that Rusyn loyalties towards the Republic of Ukraine should not be questioned.

A government representative said that he agreed to the fact that the discussion of autonomy is highly controversial. Since the 1991 referendum, however, Ukraine has adopted a constitution (1996), safeguarding the rights of all citizens of Ukraine, and according to which the country constitutes an inviolable territorial unit. The principle of autonomy stands in contrast to this unit, he emphasised. Therefore, the whole discussion of autonomy is not so acute and the rights of minorities should be solved within the framework of Ukrainian law and practice. He added that, from a European perspective, West European countries and international institutions such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe do not encourage the establishment of autonomies. In West European countries as well, the rights of the individual come before collective rights, he said.

Discussing the issues of legislation, a Rusyn minority representative declared that he saw no obstacles in the 1996 Constitution to establishing regional or local autonomies. He further referred to the 1994 Law of Ukraine on Forming Local Power and Self-Government Organs – which allows for districts and regions to act as self-government organs – and asked the government representative why this law could not be implemented, when obviously there is a significant will to achieve autonomy among the population. He also warned that citizens of Transcarpathia and the District of Berehovo/Beregszász have become increasingly disillusioned and offended due to what he termed the Ukrainian authorities' disregard of the outcome of a legitimate referendum.

*Does the Ukrainian Law on Self-Government allow for autonomy?*

Adding that the Ukrainian government recognises the existence of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea *within* Ukraine (art. 134 of the Constitution), a Hungarian representative declared that with the Crimean autonomy there indeed exists a precedent for granting autonomy to regions which so request. Elaborating further on the issue of local autonomy for the Berehovo/Beregszász District, the Hungarian minority representative explained that his organisation had prepared a draft law on local autonomy back in 1992. He stressed that this draft did not consider autonomy as a governing structure but merely defined autonomy as a special status, which would include certain economic aspects. The Berehovo/Beregszász District is located in a peripheral area near the border to

Hungary and is not attractive for investments. Autonomy would be helpful, he said, in attracting investors from nearby Hungary.

A local expert noted that in the Berehovo/Beregszász District and in other districts with compact settlements of Hungarians, it is sometimes hard to find officials in the local administration who speak Hungarian. This is a problem particularly for the lower educated segments of the Hungarian population, who may encounter difficulties communicating with the officials. He suggested that a sufficient number of officials should represent the national minority in question or, alternatively, that officials with an adequate command of Hungarian be appointed.

With regard to district autonomy for Berehovo/Beregszász, an international expert suggested that autonomy need not always be the goal. He said that solutions on issues of concern for the Hungarian minority could also be found within other frameworks. Replying to the statement by the government representative that the international community does not encourage autonomy, he admitted that the Council of Europe Framework Convention does not mention such a right. Yet, this does not mean that the Council of Europe will not, in some cases, speak out in favour of autonomy. In each case it depends on the context. As a source of inspiration, he referred to Recommendation 1201 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.<sup>9</sup>

*“Autonomy need not always be the goal...”*

A government representative replied that the new Ukrainian Constitution excludes the possibility of holding local or regional referenda on issues of autonomy. He also stressed that Recommendation 1201 does not concern autonomy but, rather, the rights of national minorities. Concerning self-government, he stated that the situation of Ukrainian Hungarians is ideal.

Summing up the discussion on autonomy, an international expert noted that problems of this type are often closely related to the insufficient contacts between the conflicting parties. He therefore welcomed the fact that a discussion on this issue between minorities in Transcarpathia and government representatives had been initiated. Encouraging the parties to further discussions and negotiations on the issue, he also stressed that on the basis of the results of the referenda held in Transcarpathia and in the Berehovo/Beregszász District, appeals for autonomy can

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<sup>9</sup> Article 11 of Recommendation 1201(1993) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on an Additional Protocol on the Rights of National Minorities to the European Convention on Human Rights states: “In the regions where they are in a majority the persons belonging to a national minority shall have the right to have at their disposal appropriate local or autonomous authorities or to have a special status, matching the specific historical and territorial situation and in accordance with the domestic legislation of the state”.



be presented with a significant authority and should therefore be taken seriously by the authorities. He also welcomed the fact that Rusyns are not demanding independence but autonomy *within* Ukraine.

## Language, Education and Cultural Issues

When Ukraine obtained independence in 1991, the new state inherited the system of minority education from the Soviet Union. From the mid 1950s, compactly settled minorities in Transcarpathia such as the Hungarians and Romanians in fact had a very efficient system for providing mother tongue education in primary and secondary schools. Today, there are 96 schools in the region providing education in Hungarian for about 20,000 children and youngsters. The majority of these schools are unilingual Hungarian, while a smaller number are bilingual Hungarian-Ukrainian and one is bilingual Hungarian-Russian. However, with Ukrainian independence, state subsidies for minority education and cultural activities have sharply declined. This has had a major impact on the educational system for minorities. Whereas state support for minority education has decreased, financial support for cultural and educational activities from the ethnic “motherland” of national minorities is increasing, especially in the case of the Hungarians.

During the Soviet era, Russian was a mandatory subject in all Hungarian schools, whereas Ukrainian was not taught. With the Ukrainian Constitution of 1996, Ukraine was declared a unitary state and Ukrainian its official language. Teaching of Ukrainian is therefore mandatory and, in general, students are required to take high school and university entrance exams in Ukrainian. A new model for minority education is currently being prepared and has been discussed several times in the *Verkhovna Rada* (the Parliament of Ukraine), although a new act on minority language education has still not been

*Ukrainian has become mandatory instead of Russian in all schools*

adopted. The so-called *Conceptual Principles of Meeting the Educational Needs of the National Minorities in Ukraine*, has been set out by the Ministry of Education and discussed in the Parliament in several rounds in 1997 and 1998. The new programme has been developed as a response to the inadequate knowledge of the Ukrainian language among certain national minorities, including the Hungarians, who under the present system are in fact able to graduate from secondary school without a proper knowledge of Ukrainian. According to the proposed concept, instruction in kindergartens and the first classes of primary school is still supposed to take place in the minority languages, whereas, above this level, the main language of instruction will be Ukrainian, thus significantly reducing the role of the minority languages.

During discussions on educational issues, a Hungarian minority representative expressed his deep concern with the new concept of language education. He considered this concept to be in sharp contrast to all international conventions as

well as the bilateral agreements between Ukraine and Hungary.<sup>10</sup> If this language programme is introduced, Hungarians will not achieve proper skills in their native tongue and will eventually assimilate into Ukrainians, he said.

Expressing his understanding with the concerns of the Hungarians on the new educational concept, a Ukrainian civic representative stressed that, within the present economic framework, it is not possible to continue the existing system of minority education. This system served a reasonable function in Soviet times, when Ukrainian was taught as a secondary language after Russian. Today, Ukraine is an independent state, he emphasised, and Ukrainian should therefore be taught as the primary language for all its citizens, regardless of ethnic origin.

A regional government representative said that Hungarians are certainly entitled to learn their native language. In Transcarpathia, there are almost a hundred Hungarian schools, a scientific Centre for Hungariology affiliated with Uzhhorod State University and a Pedagogical Institute. Approximately 700 ethnic Hungarians are currently enrolled at Uzhhorod State University. Generally, the authorities are doing their best to approach the Hungarian organisations with concern and understanding, he emphasised.

A local expert acknowledged how important it is for Hungarians to learn the Ukrainian language properly, but explained that no textbooks exist in Hungarian on the Ukrainian language. He encouraged the Ministry of Education to prepare and publish textbooks and other materials in order to ensure sufficient knowledge of the Ukrainian language, literature and history. He also noted with regret that an extremely poor financing of education and culture is a sore point for national minorities, since the Ukrainian legislation does not specify the financial support of voluntary associations.

*The problem of textbooks*

The Romanians also expressed concern about the new educational concept. A Romanian minority representative pointed to the lack of ethnic Romanian representation in the local administration. He stated that the Romanians are neither represented in the municipal councils of Rakhiv and Tyachiv Districts, the two districts in South-Eastern Transcarpathia where Romanians are territorially concentrated, nor in the cultural or educational departments of the district administrations. He added that the fact that Romanians had not been involved in

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<sup>10</sup> These agreements are: “Declaration on the Principles of Cooperation between the Republic of Hungary and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in Guaranteeing the Rights of National Minorities” (31 May 1991) and “Treaty on the Foundations of Good Neighbourly Relations and Cooperation between the Republic of Hungary and Ukraine” (6 December 1991).

the formation of territorial electoral districts had resulted in the partition of the compactly settled Romanians into two districts. Consequently, the Romanians were not numerically able to elect their candidates for political positions. He emphasised that the level of education among Romanians is among the lowest in Transcarpathia according to ethnicity.

A regional government representative agreed with the education problems of Romanians. Generally, young Romanians are not inclined to pursue higher education, and it poses a problem to recruit the youngsters to higher levels of education, he said. He expressed the hope that the Romanian minority organisation can stimulate youth toward higher education. In the town of Tyachiv, with its compact settlement of ethnic Romanians, a joint Ukrainian-Romanian school commission has been established which will deal with this and other problems related to education.

The introduction of Ukrainian as the official state language has also had a strong impact on the Russians. A minority representative of that group stated that many Russians feel humiliated in several fields of life because of the introduction of new laws on language and education. He said that Russians are deprived of the right to speak or receive an education in their own language. Besides, many Russians with insufficient Ukrainian language skills have been made redundant after the introduction of Ukrainian as the official language of administration. He also said

*Many Russians feel humiliated by laws on language and education*

that in the spheres of market economy, it is primarily ethnic Ukrainians who are involved in the processes of privatisation, at the expense of the national minorities. The Russian participant also stated that the general climate towards Russians in Transcarpathia is becoming increasingly dangerous. As an example, he referred to a recent incident where a member of the *Oblastna Rada* (the Regional Parliament) publicly stated that “the best Russian is a dead Russian”. This anti-Russian statement did not prompt an official reaction from the regional authorities, he said. By failing to do so, the authorities paved the ground for inter-ethnic tension. He also accused the authorities of oppressing the Russian minority of Ukraine, and stated that what he considered a generally nationalistic policy was causing a grave “brain drain” due to the significant outward migration of non-Ukrainians.

A government representative replied that the general difficult situation with regard to jobs, pensions, etc., caused by the economic crisis is not much different for Ukrainians than it is for Russians and other national minorities. He said that from a socio-economic viewpoint, Russians in Ukraine come second after Ukrainians and added that the Republic of Ukraine has committed itself to defending the interests

of national minorities. He expressed the hope that minority organisations would follow this line. As an example of the flexibility of the authorities, he referred to a recent controversy in the city of L'viv (in Galicia, Western Ukraine). Here, the public wished to close down a Russian school. However, the pupils protested this decision. They had studied for 9 years and were about to conclude the 10th and final grade. Thanks to negotiations, the closing of the school was postponed until the following year. The government representative expressed hope that the Russian minority representative would also be prepared to engage in a similar constructive dialogue.

The Russian representative replied that this example showed only that the Ukrainian authorities could be flexible on the issue of how to close the school, not on the fundamental issue of whether the school should be closed or not. He added that directors of Russian schools were often not allowed to register new pupils in their schools. Subsequently, the authorities had claimed that the schools suffered from recruitment problems.

A Jewish minority representative raised the question of the restitution of Jewish property. He noted that, before World War II, there were 30 synagogues in Uzhhorod alone and thousands of Jewish-owned properties throughout Transcarpathia. The synagogues were nationalised by the Soviet authorities when the region was incorporated in the Soviet Union in 1946. Today, only one building in Uzhhorod has been returned to the Jewish community, and functions as a

*The question of the restitution of Jewish property*

synagogue for the small Jewish minority. In the town of Mukachevo, some of the best real estate was owned by Jews before World War II, but no discussions have taken place on the rightful ownership of these buildings. He stated that, considering the small number of Jews in the region today, the Jewish community would not ask for the return of all property formerly owned by Jews. The strongest demands for the return of Jewish property pertain to the central synagogue, which is presently housing the Transcarpathian Philharmonic Orchestra. He said that, should the Jews succeed in having this building returned, they would establish a Holocaust Museum as well as a minority centre, not only for the Jews but for *all* the national minorities of the region. He urged the authorities to take this issue seriously. He also opted for the establishment of an independent television programme for all national minorities.

A representative of the regional authorities responded that the problems of language and culture are treated with greater attention in Ukraine than in a range of other countries. In 1997, a thousand broadcasting hours were devoted to national minorities, including programs on Jewish issues in Uzhhorod. For the Hungarians,

an average of 0.4 hours of television and 0.9 hours of radio is broadcast daily. In Transcarpathia alone, 80 publications in minority languages appear on a regular basis.

A Rusyn representative replied that Rusyn organisations have not received any financial support and have not been allowed to broadcast on television and radio in stark contrast to other national minorities. He emphasised that the Ukrainian governments' lack of recognition of the Rusyn identity is devastating for the development of Rusyn culture and language. Without recognition, the Rusyns are not allowed to establish their own schools and other culturally important institutions, he said. Under the present rule, Rusyns are not even allowed to open Sunday schools, where Rusyns can be taught their own language. Besides, Rusyn newspapers do not enjoy any support from the authorities unlike the publications of many other national minorities, the Rusyn representative stressed.

The regional government representative replied that the regional administration indeed support minority activities, including Rusyn cultural activities, and drew attention to the support of a Roma concert, a Rusyn folklore festival and a Rusyn choir.

Calling attention to the victims of World War II, a Hungarian representative pointed to the urgent need to rehabilitate all illegally persecuted individuals of various ethnic origins during the war. Hungarian and German populations were detained en masse in concentration camps and later deported by the Soviet authorities. He urged the present state authorities to apologise for the crimes committed by their predecessors and encouraged clarification of the events in the Ukrainian mass media. Another Hungarian added that the Ukrainian government should, as soon as possible, pay corresponding compensation to all natives of Transcarpathia who were repressed and removed by force to concentration and forced labour camps before, during, and after World War II, or to members of their surviving families, irrespective of ethnic origin.

*Call for apology*

With a few notable exceptions, participants at the conference generally acknowledged that the difficult economic situation in Ukraine greatly affects the national minorities of Transcarpathia. A Hungarian minority representative stated that the economic crisis in Ukraine is more harmful to national minorities than to the majority population, because it triggers a considerable emigration. Russian and Hungarian minority representatives pointed to the alarming fact that, annually, thousands of people, especially ethnic Russians and Hungarians, emigrate to Russia and Hungary respectively, in search of better living conditions. Slovaks,

Romanians, Germans and Jews have also emigrated in considerable numbers. To improve the economic conditions for minorities in Transcarpathia, a Hungarian minority representative pointed to the need to develop trade across the borders to neighbouring Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. In fact, he stated, the Hungarian government had recently drafted an inter-governmental agreement to regulate and facilitate economic and trade relations across the border. However, the Ukrainian government had responded with new strict customs regulations in July 1998 which adversely affect the Hungarian population of Transcarpathia whose survival greatly depends on small-scale cross-border trade with Hungary. He stressed the need to adjust cross-border regulations and to open new border crossings between Ukraine and Hungary. He also criticised the authorities for a newly-implemented 30% increase in import duties imposed upon newspapers, magazines and other

*Emigration from  
Transcarpathia*

publications, which in effect prevents Hungarians and other persons belonging to minority groups from reading publications from their motherlands. The same arguments could apply to the Slovak and Romanian minorities living in Transcarpathia, the Hungarian representative concluded. A Romanian representative added that, despite the creation, in February 1993, of the Carpathian Euroregion (including Transcarpathia and Western Galicia, Ukraine, South-Eastern Poland, North-Eastern Hungary, Eastern Slovakia and North-Western Romania), it has become increasingly difficult to maintain regular contacts with family and friends across the Ukrainian border, as one needs foreign passports, visas or insurance-documents, which are available only at extremely high fees. For the majority of the inhabitants of Transcarpathia, visiting relatives in neighbouring countries remains a dream, he concluded.

In recent years, the Ukrainian government has not provided any regular financial aid to support national minorities and their activities. In legal terms, minorities and their organisations are not entitled to financial support. However, minority

*“If a state has  
national minorities,  
then it costs money”*

organisations may submit applications for the support of particular events. A Russian minority representative stated that if a state has national minorities, then it costs money. If the government cannot afford the “luxury” of having national minorities, he would consider it an offence. The government must prove that it amounts to more than populist declarations to promote integration with European countries. A Jewish representative added that if the government could not support minorities financially, then at least it could ease taxation on activities conducted by national minorities.

A government representative repeated that he understood very well the minorities’ feelings that their economic problems had not been solved satisfactorily. However,

this should not be perceived as lack of sympathy or misconduct from the side of the authorities, he said. This is simply due to the general economic problems of the country. There are about 100 national minorities in Ukraine, and they all have their problems.

A local expert also found that most of the problems of the minorities could be traced back to the lack of funds in Ukraine. He continued that if the economy of Ukraine were improved, the impact on national minorities would be felt immediately. Commenting on this statement, a Ukrainian civic representative stated that Ukrainians represent 78% of the population of Transcarpathia. He stressed that the current economic situation for Ukrainians is no better than for other ethnic groups. Furthermore, Ukrainians are not involved in cross-border trade as are other groups. Discomfort is not only due to geographical reasons but also to political reasons. He noted with regret that inter-ethnic relations in Transcarpathia are deteriorating. The emergence of strong anti-Ukrainian tendencies, evident among some of the speakers of the conference, is a clear expression of this fact, he said.



## The Roma population

The Roma are mostly settled in *tabors* (camps) throughout Transcarpathia. There are some 50-60 *tabors* in the region, with populations ranging from a few families up to over a thousand inhabitants. In addition, a number of Roma live in the major towns of the region, especially in Uzhhorod, Mukachevo and Berehovo/Beregszász.

As elsewhere in Europe, the Roma are undoubtedly the most deprived ethnic group in Transcarpathia. Since Ukrainian independence in 1991, their situation has deteriorated compared to Soviet times. The decline of the regional economy has

*The most deprived and vulnerable ethnic group in Transcarpathia*

had an especially negative impact on the living conditions of Roma and has contributed to their further marginalisation. The overwhelming majority of Roma are unemployed and the primary sources of income

today are reported to be scrap metal collection, paper recycling, begging, etc. In the *tabors*, Roma live virtually on the edge of starvation. Their housing is without running water, wastewater drainage, and only seldom with electricity. The lack of such basic necessities has led to a low level of hygienic standards, resulting in the spread of epidemic diseases.

One issue discussed at the conference pertained to the number of Roma living in Transcarpathia. A local expert stated that the figure is around 45,000 and not 12,000 according to the 1989 census, a figure persistently cited by the Ukrainian authorities. According to a Roma representative, there could be as many as 66,000 Roma in Transcarpathia. The problem, he noted, is that many Roma choose to designate themselves under other ethnic origins, especially as Ukrainians or Hungarians, in order to avoid discrimination by the authorities or the local population. In many cases, Roma have even appealed to the authorities to register them as Ukrainians instead of Roma.

A local expert emphasised the importance of avoiding “Ukrainisation” or “Magyarisation” during the upcoming population census and, as an example, pointed to the fact that during the last 1989 census in the town of Svalyava with its numerous Roma population, most Roma were counted as Ukrainians. A regional government official agreed that the actual number of Roma is an unsettled issue and expressed hope that the upcoming census will clarify this question.

The level of education among Roma is the lowest in Ukraine if measured according to ethnicity. A local expert explained that when Roma children begin school they are fully conversant in the Romani language, but do not speak nor

understand Ukrainian. This disadvantages them socially and, in many instances, they drop out of school early. It is one reason why there is a dire need for Roma kindergartens, she argued. One such kindergarten, run by the main Roma organisation “Romani Yag”, was established in early 1998 – the first of its kind in Transcarpathia and in Ukraine as a whole. In the kindergarten, Roma children will learn to speak and understand Ukrainian, which will facilitate their social integration and allow them to complete their primary education. The local expert called for the establishment of a scientific centre as well as the opening of officially recognised and government supported schools for Roma children, where the language, history and culture of Roma can be taught.

Speaking on governmental support, a Roma representative noted that, in the early days of Ukrainian independence, his organisation and other Roma organisations received modest support for cultural activities, whereas in the latter years, no support – neither moral nor financial – has been granted. He also stressed that, unlike many other national minorities, there is no television broadcasting for Roma in Transcarpathia, or in Ukraine as a whole for that matter. Apart from highlights from Roma cultural events, the Ukrainian mass media pay no attention to the situation of Roma. In general, the Ukrainian mass media treat the Roma population in a negative and stigmatising fashion. Ukrainian newspapers repeatedly view Roma as criminals, Mafia elements or with similar prejudicial attitudes. Usually, the authorities take no steps against xenophobic statements of that kind.

*Viewed by the mass media as criminals*

A government official admitted that, while such anti-Roma views do appear in the Ukrainian mass media, the State Committee for Nationalities and Migration has strongly criticised newspapers for publishing such statements. A local government representative added that the local administration has recently urged several newspapers to immediately stop printing prejudicial anti-Roma articles.

A suggestion was put forward by a local expert that the authorities begin supporting publication of Roma newspapers, magazines and allot time on television for broadcasting information for and about Roma. She also proposed that a programme be elaborated by the authorities in collaboration with Roma organisations on the fulfilment of Roma social and cultural needs.

A government representative agreed that the Roma are in a vulnerable position and that there is a need to improve their material, social and cultural situation. However, he drew attention to the fact that Ukraine is in the midst of a severe economic crisis. There are presently around 300 organisations of national minorities, he said, and, regrettably, it is extremely difficult under these

circumstances to distribute the limited funds on an equal basis. Nevertheless, 7,000 Ukrainian Hrivnya were allocated in 1997 (at that time equivalent to about 4,000 USD) for the publication of a Romani dictionary and it is presently being considered to erect a monument commemorating the Roma who perished at Babi Yar in Kyiv during the Nazi occupation. The government is currently attempting to raise funds for this purpose. He stated that he would consider the suggestions put forward at the conference on the improvement of the Roma situation and investigate how they could be carried out.

A Roma representative said that 1,400 Roma in Ukraine have so far officially applied for compensation for their suffering as a result of the Holocaust during World War II. In spite of this, nothing has been done to consider their applications. A state official replied that it is necessary for specialists to further investigate this question before concrete steps can be taken.

A local expert stressed the importance of taking the hierarchical structure of Roma kinship relations into consideration when conducting policies on ethno-national issues. Roma belong to three social groups or castes, which are believed to derive from the Indian caste structure, she explained. At the top of the hierarchy is the caste of musicians, then come the craftsmen, and, at the absolute bottom, usually urban dwellers who live in towns such as Uzhhorod, Mukachevo and Berehovo/Beregszász subsisting as street cleaners and beggars. Roma caste affiliations are determined by birth and cross-caste marriages are rare. Individuals belonging to the lower castes respect the musicians and accept their authority. She criticised the regional authorities, presumably unaware of this kinship structure, for having begun recently to co-operate and deal directly with representatives of the lower castes, thereby contributing to social confusion within the traditional structure of Roma society. For this and other reasons, she urged the authorities to support the establishment of Roma research centres in Ukraine, and especially in Transcarpathia, thereby following the example of Hungary, Slovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia, where such institutions have been created in the 1990s.

*The importance of  
Roma hierarchy  
for policy-making*

Finally, a regional government representative found that it is up to the minorities themselves how they organise internally. He also expressed gratitude for international financial support for Roma activities, in particular the funds granted by the *International Renaissance Foundation* (Soros Foundation) for the renovation of a football field. As a result, a Roma football team has been organised. Activities of this kind counteract the social destruction of young Roma men, the government representative noted. He concluded with a commitment to support the creation of a local Roma newspaper.

## Conclusions and Adoption of Recommendations

The final session of the conference was devoted to the evaluation of the event and the adoption of recommendations on the improvement of inter-ethnic and minority-state relations in the Transcarpathian Region. During the general round of evaluation, a Hungarian representative called the conference a historic meeting. Never before had there been such a meeting of all national minorities in the region which had included the participation of the authorities. He stated that the conference had brought together various parties and that this had resulted in a significant improvement of the mutual understanding between authorities and minorities. He concluded by expressing his sincere hope for the future autonomy of Transcarpathia.

A Rusyn participant also acknowledged that an important dialogue with the authorities had been established. No such dialogue, he said, had ever before taken place despite numerous official letters and appeals from Rusyn organisations to relevant Ukrainian bodies on issues pertaining to autonomy and recognition of the Rusyns as a national minority. In fact, he said, the present conference constituted the first opportunity since the demise of the Soviet Union for minority groups in Transcarpathia to conduct a direct discussion on these issues with high-level representatives of the national authorities.

*An important dialogue with the authorities was established*

Summing up the discussions of the conference, a government representative referred to the two main themes which were to be addressed according to the programme: 1) relations between the titular nation and minorities, and 2) relations between the national minorities. In reality, however, he noted that the discussions had focused mainly on relations between national minorities and authorities. Nevertheless, he found the proceedings of the conference fruitful. He acknowledged that the current problems of national minorities have not only been triggered by the independence of Ukraine and the current economic problems, but are also determined by historic factors and the century-long struggle for Ukrainian independence. He added that if the Rusyns consider themselves a people they are entitled to certain rights as such. This is an issue of collective rights, which cannot just be solved by a decree as apparently hoped by some, he said, and acknowledged that Rusyns had generally demonstrated their tolerance, which he took as a positive token. As a final remark, he stated that the Ukrainian President's office, which was represented at the conference, closely monitors the developments in Transcarpathian Ukraine and constantly tries to solve the problems of national minorities. He further emphasised that the government does not strive to assimilate ethnic groups. On the contrary, it tries to

*"... Rusyns demonstrated their tolerance..."*

develop a polyethnic society. Only in this way can Ukraine move towards European integration. Let this be the conclusion of the conference, he said.

An international expert, on the basis of the general discussions, concluded that the authorities and national minorities speak the same language but conduct their discussions in different and mutually exclusive discourses and therefore need a mediator to establish common understanding. He spoke about the need for a local or international neutral institution to engage in continuous mediation efforts between the Ukrainian authorities and Transcarpathia's minorities.

Speaking on the activities of the *Ukrainian Mediation Group* (UMG), an agency established in Donetsk, Ukraine, in 1993, the expert suggested that a branch office of UMG could provide such mediation. The UMG already operates in seven regions of the country and is ready to open an eighth branch office in Uzhhorod, he said. So far, UMG has not dealt particularly with issues pertaining to national minorities but rather focussed on labour conflicts in Ukraine. Nevertheless, he stressed, since UMG has specialised in conflict mediation practices, the agency would be ready and willing to mediate between minorities and authorities in Transcarpathia.<sup>11</sup>

Another government representative concluded that the conference had also contributed to an increased understanding of the viewpoints of international experts. He agreed on the need to learn from other European models, adding that Transcarpathia also has positive experiences with conflict resolution, from which others may learn. Summing up, he said that a well-founded legislation and a certain measure of experience are prerequisites for solving the basic problems of minorities. Realistically, the main problem is money, he stressed. If the situation in general is improved, the problems of the minorities will also be solved, he concluded.

*“Transcarpathia has experiences with conflict resolution, from which others may learn”*

An international expert said that, unlike certain other parts of Europe, he considered the atmosphere among Transcarpathia's national minorities to be quite pleasant. He noted that the authorities during the conference had been open to critique from the minorities to a much greater extent than in many other countries.

A government representative replied that the international community always places demands for the improvement of minority rights but that these demands are not followed by financial support for their actual implementation. On the other hand, international organisations widely support the minorities themselves and their activities. He pointed to the considerable financial support of the OSCE to the

<sup>11</sup> A branch office of the UMG was subsequently established in Uzhhorod in early 1999.

Crimean Tatars and their return to Crimea from Central Asia.

Rusyn and Russian representatives urged the regional administration to establish a forum for the exchange of viewpoints of national minorities of the region. In fact, a Rusyn representative explained, an umbrella organisation for national minorities was established in 1991 – the Democratic League of Nationalities of

*A regional forum  
for the exchange  
of views is needed*

Transcarpathia. This organisation worked as an excellent forum for debating issues pertaining to national minorities, and its meetings were most often attended by representatives of the regional administrations department for nationality and migration issues. In 1993, however, a new law on registration was introduced and re-registration of the League proved impossible, as the law does not allow umbrella organisations to register. Since that time, the Democratic League has worked as an informal network for communication and co-ordination, linking more than ten organisations of national minorities. The Democratic League has submitted an Appeal on the improvement of minority rights in conjunction with the conference (see the English translation of the text of this Appeal in the Appendix). He urged the authorities to promote formalisation of the status of the League again, or, alternatively, under the auspices of the *Oblastna Rada* (the Regional Parliament), to establish a round-table forum for regular consultations, which would include *all* national minority organisations.

The concluding plenary session was devoted to recommendations of the conference. Instead of formulating a set of recommendations based on the general consensus of the participants, taking into consideration the sharply contrasting points of views expressed, the organisers suggested the conference to take *ad notam* the recommendations formulated by the European Centre for Minority Issues (as a neutral conflict-mediating institution), which had been drafted on the basis of the discussions and suggestions from minority and government representatives. The organisers then presented the complete text of the ECMI Recommendations. Some paragraphs of the Recommendations were subsequently modified according to the suggestions from the participants (the final text of the ECMI Recommendations in Russian and in English translation are annexed to this report).

Following the official closing of the conference, a press conference was held in Uzhhorod, the regional administrative centre of Transcarpathian Ukraine. Some 100 people took part in the press event. Apart from participants in the conference, a considerable number of journalists from local, regional and national Ukrainian newspapers and television attended the press conference together with manifold minority activists.

# APPENDIX

## ECMI Recommendations (in Russian)

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*(Office Translation of the Russian Original by ECMI)*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

of the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)  
based on the results of the International Conference

### **"Inter-Ethnic Relations in Transcarpathian Ukraine"**

Uzhhorod, Ukraine,  
4-7 September 1998

#### **PREAMBLE**

ECMI is an independent institution, founded by the governments of the Kingdom of Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, and the German Land Schleswig-Holstein.

In May 1997 ECMI and the Baltic Academy in Lübeck-Travemünde, Germany, organised an international conference "Minorities in the Ukraine" in which representatives of the government of Ukraine and minority organisations from Transcarpathia (Zakarpatska oblast') took part.

The next step was the international conference "Inter-Ethnic Relations in Transcarpathian Ukraine" organised from 4 to 7 September 1998 by ECMI in cooperation with the Association for Culture and Education Promotion LIK in Uzhhorod, Ukraine. There were 53 participants in the conference: representatives of the Council of Europe and the OSCE, of the government of Ukraine and the regional administration of Transcarpathia, Ukrainian experts on nationality issues, as well as representatives of local minority and cultural organisations (see attached List of Participants).

The working languages of the conference were Ukrainian, Russian and English.

The aims of the conference were as follows:

- 1) to familiarise local minority and cultural organisations with recent developments in international and Ukrainian minority legislation and to discuss the implications for ethnic groups and minorities in Transcarpathian Ukraine;
- 2) to examine the effect of contemporary social and economic issues on local ethnic and minority groups;
- 3) to agree on general principles governing inter-ethnic relations in Transcarpathian Ukraine.

In the first session of the conference, international experts gave an overview of international standards on the rights of national minorities, with a special focus on the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (which entered into force in Ukraine on 1 May 1998), as well as the European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages. Also, an overview of the activities of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities was

given, and a representative of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO) spoke about the work of this new organisation founded in 1991.

The representatives of the Government and the President of Ukraine as well as the local governmental organs of Transcarpathia along with the representatives of local minority and cultural organisations analysed Ukrainian minority policy and expressed their opinions about serious problems they face in their daily activities.

With appreciation for the key role that Transcarpathia plays in the stability and security of East Central Europe, and based on the discussions during the conference, ECMI proposes the following:

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Welcoming the participation of the Council of Europe, the OSCE, and international and national non-governmental organisations in the work of the conference, ECMI considers their further involvement in the resolution of inter-ethnic issues in Transcarpathia as important and necessary.
2. The ratification by Ukraine of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities must be followed by a prompt, effective and thorough implementation of this instrument. A broad range of Ukrainian minority and other non-governmental organisations should be involved in the preparation of the initial state report (due 1 May 1999) by the appropriate government structures.
3. Ukraine must ratify the Council of Europe European Charter on Regional or Minority Languages without delay.
4. The minorities policy of Ukraine should be conducted in accordance with the following international documents: the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious or Linguistic Minorities (1992), the Copenhagen Document of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE (1990), Recommendation 1201 (1993) and Recommendation 1353 (1998) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities of the Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations (FIER) (1996), and the Oslo Recommendations Regarding the Linguistic Rights of National Minorities (FIER) (1998).
5. Measures to encourage transfrontier and sub-regional cooperation should be taken. In this context, full implementation of existing bilateral treaties between Ukraine and neighbouring countries is recommended.
6. Particular attention should be paid so that modifications in Ukrainian legislation do not lower the current level of minority standards in various areas, such as education.
7. In order to achieve transparency in the forthcoming population census in Ukraine, the monitoring of the census-taking and compilation of results should be conducted with the assistance of local, national and international non-governmental organisations.

8. Keeping in mind that, according to international law, "the existence of minorities is a question of fact, not of law," the right to freedom of association must be guaranteed to all persons belonging to national minorities. In this context, ECMI welcomes the establishment of direct contact between representatives of the higher echelons of the Ukrainian government and the Transcarpathian Rusyns within the framework of the this conference.

9. Taking into account the difficult situation in which the Roma of Transcarpathia find themselves, special assistance measures should be devised in order to raise their level of education and to improve their economic position and state of health.

10. Special attention should be devoted to the preservation of natural resources and means of livelihood which form the basis for the traditional way of life of minorities in Transcarpathia.

11. A permanent forum (round-table) should be created at the regional administration of Transcarpathia with the participation of representatives of minorities living in Transcarpathia for the development of a dialogue between minorities and government structures.

12. ECMI recommends a close examination of the detailed proposals signed by 12 representatives of Transcarpathian nationalities to the concluding document of the conference, as well as of other proposals made during the conference, in the course of dialogue between the government of Ukraine and minority organisations.

13. In dealing with inter-ethnic relations in Transcarpathia the parties should take into account the rich international experience in this field. ECMI is prepared to provide information and to communicate practical experiences and existing models of ethnic accommodation from decentralisation to various forms of autonomy.

In conclusion, ECMI emphasises that, alongside the complex problems of inter-ethnic relations, Transcarpathia has also accumulated a valuable, centuries-long experience in the peaceful coexistence of various national groups. This experience deserves special attention given the difficulties in ensuring ethnic harmony in certain regions of Europe. ECMI will prepare a report on the conference "Inter-Ethnic Relations in Transcarpathian Ukraine" which will be published and distributed internationally. Together with the OSCE and the Danish Democracy Foundation ECMI is planning follow-up measures on inter-ethnic relations in Transcarpathian Ukraine.

Uzhhorod, Ukraine, 7 September 1998.

*The Organisers of the Conference:*

Stefan Troebst,  
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Randolf Oberschmidt  
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## **List of Participants of the Conference**

"Inter-Ethnic Relations in Transcarpathian Ukraine"  
Uzhhorod, Ukraine, 4-7 September 1998

ADAM, Aladar	Chairman, The Cultural-Educational Organisation of Gypsies "Romani Yag" (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
ADAM, Jozif	Chairman, The Gipsy Society of Transcarpathia "Roma" (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
ALMASHYJ, Mikhajlo	Chairman, The Duchnovych Society (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
BORISOV, Nikolay	Head of the Board, Ukrainian Mediation Group (Donetsk, Ukraine)
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HORVAT, Josip	Chairman of the Society of Slovaks in Transcarpathia "L. Shtura" (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)

HORVÁTH, Sándor	Chairman of the Forum of Hungarian Organisations (Berehovo/Beregszász, Ukraine)
HUDANICH, V.	Chairman of the Ukrainian People's Council of Transcarpathia (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
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KRIVTSOV, Aleksander	Chairman of the Russian Congregation of Transcarpathia (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
LATKO, Ivan	Chairman of the Regional Branch of the Ukrainian Society for the Preservation of History and Culture (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
LUTSKER, Lev	Chairman of the Transcarpathian Jewish Cultural Society (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
LYZANETS', Petro	Chairman of the Hungarian Scientific Society of Transcarpathia; Director of the Center for Hungariology, Uzhhorod State University (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
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MÄLL, Linnart	Head of the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisation (UNPO) Coordination Office for the CIS (Tartu, Estonia)



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MITSIK, Vsevolod	Ukrainian Member of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; Associate Professor, Institute of International Relations, Taras Shevchenko University (Kyiv, Ukraine)
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NIKOGOSYAN, Sergey	Chairman of the Society of Armenian Culture of Transcarpathia "Ararat" (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
OBERSCHMIDT, Randolf	Member of the OSCE Mission to Moldova (Chisinau, Moldova)
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PAP, Omelyan	Chairman of the Transcarpathian Regional Society "Amaro Drom" (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
PELIN, Aleksander	Sociologist, LIK (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
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POPIK, Sergei	Head of the Department for National, Confessional and Migrational Issues, Chernivtsy Regional Administration (Chernivtsy, Ukraine)
RUSYN, Kerel	Chairman of the Society of Sub-Carpathian Rusyns (Mukachevo, Ukraine)
SHENTSEVA, Lena	Director, Association for Culture and Education Promotion LIK (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
SHKLYAR, Leonid	Chief Adviser, Administration of the President of Ukraine (Kyiv, Ukraine)

SIMIONKA, Yurij	The Socio-Cultural Society of Romanians of Transcarpathia "D. Koshbuka" (Solotvino, Ukraine)
SYDOR, Dymytri	Chairman of the Cyril and Methodius Society of Transcarpathia (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
TARCHINETS', Ol'ga	Association for Culture and Education Promotion LIK (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
TÓTH, Mihály	Chairman of the Hungarian Democratic Alliance of Ukraine (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
TRIER, Tom	ECMI Regional Representative for Ukraine (Copenhagen, Denmark)
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TROSHCHYNSKIY, Volodymyr.	First Deputy Head, State Committee of Ukraine for Nationalities and Migration (Kyiv, Ukraine)
TURYANITSA, Ivan	Chairman of the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
UJHELY, Yudita	Financial Director, Ukrainian Mediation Group (Donetsk, Ukraine)
VAKAROVA, Galina	Chairperson of the Society of Polish Culture of Transcarpathia (Uzhhorod, Ukraine)
VASSILEV, Stefan	Adviser to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (The Hague, Netherlands)

**To:  
the working body of the pan-European Conference  
on Security and Cooperation in Europe,  
the Council of Europe,  
the European Centre for Minority Issues,  
the Federalist Union of European Nationalities**

## **APPEAL**

### **of the Democratic League of Nationalities of Transcarpathia**

The Democratic League of Nationalities of Transcarpathia, which unites the national-cultural organisations and associations of our region, asks you, honourable and authoritative European organisations, to turn your attention to and inform the European community about the outrageous facts of the violation of the provisions of the General Declaration of Human Rights, in Ukraine in general, and in particular in the historical Subcarpathian Rus' (at present Transcarpathian region of Ukraine). In this context, we urge you:

- to guarantee and defend the rights of the ethnic group of Subcarpathian Rus' which have been continuously restricted by the official authorities;
- to guarantee and assist in the reestablishment of the Rusyn ethnic group, neither recognised by the Soviet Union during the post-war period nor at present by Ukraine;
- to guarantee and assist in the re-establishment of the historical state system of Subcarpathian Rus' in the form of an autonomous Transcarpathia (i.e., a special self-governed territory) as a part of Ukraine, for which 78% of the adult population of our region voted during the Referendum of 1 December 1991;
- to guarantee and assist in the realisation of the will of the Hungarian population of the Beregovsky district of Subcarpathian Rus', 91% of whom voted for the creation of a Hungarian ethnic district on the territory of the region during the above-mentioned Referendum of 1 December 1991;
- to contribute to the granting of the status of repressed people to all persons of Subcarpathian Rus' who suffered before and during World War II and are still alive at present, irrespective of their ethnic origin, given that there were concentration camps for the local population in 1938-39 (at Rakhov-Dumen) and in 1944-45 (at Svalyava);
- to call upon Ukraine to pay the corresponding compensation to all natives of the region who were repressed before and after World War II, or to the members of their families, irrespective of their ethnic origin.

In light of the aforesaid, we request you to use all your international authority to send a

permanent representative of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe to Subcarpathian Rus' who would monitor the observance of human rights (in general as well as minority rights) in our region, as well as the fulfilment of the provisions and demands of those international legal documents which have been ratified by Ukraine;

- to provide the possibility of financial aid for the normal functioning of the Democratic League of Nationalities of Transcarpathia, including the rent or purchase of premises for a technical support office with equipment for accounting, planning and analysis of operations, and for a minimum number of employees at the secretariat of the League necessary for basic daily activities.

*At the commissions of the boards of the municipal societies of Subcarpathian Rusyns of the cities of Uzhhorod and Mukachevo and the district associations of Subcarpathian Rusyns of Perechynsky, Svalyavsky, Khustsky, Tyachevsky, Vinogradovsky and Irshavsky Districts –*

Chairman of the Board of the Regional Society of Carpatho-Rusyns	Professor Ivan Turyanitsa
Chairman of the Cyril and Methodius Society of Transcarpathia	Father Dimitrij Sydor
Chairman of the Scientific-Educational Society of Rusyns	Dr. Mykolai Makara
Chairman of the Transcarpathian Duchnovych Society	Mikhail Almashyj
Chairman of the municipal Duchnovych Society of Uzhhorod	Lyudvig Filip

*Adopted at the general meeting of Rusyn organisations of the historical Subcarpathian Rus' on 8 August 1998*

Chairman of the Society of Hungarian Intelligentsia in Transcarpathia	Yuri Dupko
Chairman of the Society of Hungarians of Uzhhorod	Zoltan Krajnyak
Chairman of the Cultural-Educational Organisation of Gypsies "Romani Yag"	Aladar Adam
Chairman of the Society of Slovaks in Transcarpathia "L. Shtura"	Josip Horvat
Chairman of the Transcarpathian Jewish Cultural Society	Lev Lutsker
Chairman of the German Cultural Society "Revival" in Transcarpathia	Zoltan Kizman
Chairman of the Society of Slovaks in Uzhhorod	Ivan Latko

*Adopted at the meeting of the Coordinating Council of the Democratic League of Nationalities of Transcarpathia on 8 August 1998.*

## What Can Europe Learn From Transcarpathia?

Paul Robert Magocsi \*

This year, 1998, is for me an important anniversary, for it was thirty years ago, as a result of the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia that I decided to redirect my scholarly interests and to work on the modern history of Transcarpathia (*Subcarpathian Rus'*) as part of my doctoral studies in the United States. As a result of that decision, I have since then researched various aspects of Transcarpathian history, most especially the nationality question among the region's numerically largest indigenous population, the Rusyns, and have published several hundred studies on that topic during the past quarter century. What, then, should I say in response to the invitation by the European Centre for Minority Issues (Flensburg, Germany) to address this gathering held in conjunction with an international conference on the nationalities of Transcarpathia?

I decided it might be appropriate to share with you some reflections that come from someone who has never lived in this region, but who has tried to understand and write about it for the past three decades. My reflections this evening will look briefly at three themes or characteristics of Transcarpathia: its physical geography, its multinational composition, and its political-historic distinctiveness.

While preparing these remarks, basked in the mild climate of another of Europe's historically renowned regions – Provence – I was struck by something that I had not thought about before. Following the Revolutions of 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union two years later, it became quite fashionable for scholars and political commentators from the so-called democratic and capitalist West to be invited to speak at various kinds of conferences and symposia in east-central Europe and the former Soviet Union. Often the underlying motivation behind most of these meetings was that we from the so-called “West” represented countries that could teach the new post-Communist countries how to create liberal democratic and free-market societies. Learn from us and the way to western Europe's prosperity and freedom will be open. In one sense, this very conference on national minorities in Transcarpathia is still part of that pedagogic tradition of “the West” teaching “the East”. From what I am about to say, however, it may be that the so-called “East”, in this case specifically Transcarpathia, has something to teach “the West”.

Let us turn, then, to the first of Transcarpathia's characteristics that I wish to address, its physical geography. Many Europeans like to speak of their country or their specific region as being in the centre, or as representing the proverbial heart, of the Continent. But it is not far from where we sit this evening that the real centre of Europe is to be found. Just 120 kilometres to the east lies the Transcarpathian village of Dilove (formerly Trebushany). Not far from the centre of Dilove one can still find two monuments that are alongside each other. One was built by the Hungarian Government in 1875, the other by the Soviet government exactly a century later in 1975. Both monuments mark the exact geographical mid-point of the European Continent as calculated by scholars in Hungary over a century ago.

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\* Professor Paul Robert Magocsi holds the Chair of Ukrainian studies at the University of Toronto. He gave this presentation as an after-dinner speech on 6 September 1998 for the participants of the conference “Inter-Ethnic Relations in Transcarpathian Ukraine”.

To keep our discussion in geographic perspective, it should be remembered that Transcarpathia's farthest extent from west to east is at most only 200 kilometres and from north to south about 75 to 80 kilometres for a total surface area of 12,753 square kilometres.

The primary geographic characteristic of Transcarpathia is the mountain chain of the eastern Carpathian ranges whose crests form the region's northern border. The mountain crests, with only a few passes (Uzhok, Verets'kyi, Iablunyts'kyi/Tatar), have traditionally formed a natural barrier separating the region from other areas of Ukraine to the north. By contrast, all of Transcarpathia's rivers flow southward toward the Tysa/Tisza, which, in turn, flows westward into the Danube. Hence, Transcarpathia is geographically part of the Danubian Basin and indelibly a part of central Europe. This basic geographic fact explains why Transcarpathia, its inhabitants, and their cultures have always been more closely related to whatever state and society has ruled the Danubian Basin – for over 800 years the Hungarian Kingdom – than to the peoples and societies beyond the mountains to the north.

Whereas Transcarpathia may be in the geographical centre of Europe, it has never acquired the kind of economic wealth nor has it experienced the cultural vibrancy that is usually associated with centrally located areas in other parts of the Continent. This is because Transcarpathia has always been a peripheral and underdeveloped part of whatever state has ruled here, whether the Hungarian Kingdom until 1918, the Czechoslovak republic from 1919 to 1938, the Soviet Union from 1945 to 1991, or an independent Ukraine since then. Economic underdevelopment and even backwardness have certainly had a negative impact, creating a poverty-stricken environment that has periodically forced its inhabitants to emigrate in order to survive.

On the other hand, economic underdevelopment has created what some might consider an unexpected positive result. What I have in mind is this: for most of its history (the Soviet period being the major exception), generations of Transcarpathia's inhabitants, especially in rural villages, were left alone to live their own lives without much interference from the ruling state. In other words, official neglect by state authorities produced not only economic backwardness, it also allowed Transcarpathia's inhabitants to retain their rich, variegated, and often archaic cultural and linguistic characteristics. Such conscious or unconscious awareness of a distinct culture, I might add, can often assist individuals as they adjust to the changes that often accompany the demands and disruptions of modern life.

This leads me to the second characteristic of Transcarpathia, its multinational composition. According to the last census in 1989, the region had a total of 1,252,300 inhabitants, of whom 976,749 were Rusyns and Ukrainians; 155,711 Magyars; 49,458 Russians; and 29,485 Romanians; followed by smaller numbers of Roma (12,131), Slovaks (7,329), Germans (3,478), Jews (2,639), Belarusians (2,521) and others (6,117). Until they were removed in connection with events during World War II, there were also about 30,000 Czechs and a much higher number of Jews – 102,542, representing 14.1 percent of Transcarpathia's population in 1931. Jews were particularly well represented in the region's small towns and cities, so that in 1931, for instance, they made up nearly half of the residents of Mukachevo (43.3 percent) and over one-quarter of the residents in Berehovo (29.9 percent), Uzhhorod (27.6 percent), and Chust (27 percent). The point is that whereas the percentages or the very presence of different peoples may have varied, Transcarpathia has been and remains a multinational region.

An important aspect of Transcarpathia's multinationalism, or multiculturalism, has been the ability of its peoples for most of their history to live together in the absence of the national hatred and violence that has often characterised many other multinational parts of Europe, including regions adjacent to Transcarpathia. I am not attempting to idealise local conditions or to distort the historical record by suggesting that there has never been discrimination and suffering imposed on the inhabitants of Transcarpathia because of their national background.

I would suggest, however, that whatever instance of friction or violence that may have occurred has been the result of external forces; that is, such incidents were the result of the actions of states that have ruled the region and not the inhabitants themselves. For instance, the Hungarian regime before 1918 and again during World War II from time to time persecuted for religious or political reasons certain Rusyn or Ukrainian political and cultural activists. What is important to note here is that such incidents were not accompanied by friction between the local Magyar and Rusyn populations that have always lived in harmony. Analogously, Transcarpathia is one of the few regions in east-central Europe where there were never any pogroms perpetuated against Jews. The historic record seems to suggest as well that there was an absence of violence on the part of the local population even during the darkest hour of Transcarpathia's Jews, when in 1944 they were deported en masse by the Hungarian regime of Admiral Horthy to die a brutal death in Nazi concentration camps.

It is also true that many local inhabitants, Magyars and Germans as well as Rusyns, suffered persecution at the hands of the Soviet regime immediately after 1945, and it might be expected that these peoples would react unfavourably to the relatively large number of Russians who came to settle in Transcarpathia under the auspices of the Soviet regime. No such friction with the local population seems to have occurred. Finally, there is the sensitive issue of those individuals who since 1990 have openly identified themselves as Rusyns. Some of them feel that as the indigenous East Slavic population of the region they have, since the onset of Soviet rule, been unfairly passed over for leading positions in the regional administration and economy that have been given to newcomers from other parts of the former Soviet Union, in particular from neighbouring Galicia. There is, moreover, at times harsh rhetoric expressed in the press criticising the often condescending attitude of Galician Ukrainians toward the local Rusyn population. Nevertheless, there has not been anything that could be classified as serious Rusyn-Ukrainian confrontation or conflict. This is because the concept of live and let live is what seems to pervade most of Transcarpathian society, a concept that characterises relations among the many different peoples who have lived here for centuries as well as the interactions with those who arrived during the Soviet period after World War II.

In a real sense, conferences like the present one, and in particular any similar gatherings that may take place in the future, might concentrate their efforts not on teaching or preaching, but rather on learning, that is, to discern why there has been no violence and relatively little confrontation in the past between Transcarpathia's various peoples. Put another way, Transcarpathia may serve as a model of peaceful coexistence for other less fortunate multinational regions both within and beyond Europe.

Finally, there is another characteristic of Transcarpathia that should not be forgotten. It is what I would call its political distinctiveness. Transcarpathia, or historic *Subcarpathian Rus'*, was conceived and treated by the international community as a distinct territorial entity not because of its multinational composition, but because it was a land associated with the largest number of

its indigenous inhabitants – the Rusyns. As far back as the tenth and eleventh centuries, Hungarian documents referred to this region as the *Marchia Ruthenorum*, that is, the march, or borderland, inhabited by the people of Rus'. In more modern times, Transcarpathia formed the basis of the Habsburg government's Uzshorod District which for a few months in 1849-1850 became popularly known as a "Rusyn District" where officials of Rusyn origin led by the political activist Adol'f Dobrians'kyi staffed much of the local administration, and where even the Rusyn language was used alongside Hungarian and German in public affairs.

It was in the twentieth century, however, that *Subcarpathian Rus'* / Transcarpathia was fixed as a distinct territorial entity with boundaries that have remained basically unchanged until today. Throughout the twentieth century, every country that began its rule in Transcarpathia felt obliged to recognise the Rusyn factor and to propose granting autonomy to the region based on the general principle of national self-determination for the region's most numerous indigenous people, the Rusyns.

Hence, in late 1918, the new Hungarian Republic under Mihaly Károlyi brought into being *Rus'ka Kra'na*, which was continued for a few months in early 1919 under the Hungarian Communist government of Béla Kun. Then, in May 1919, local Rusyn leaders, with support from Rusyn immigrants in the United States, voluntarily joined the new republic of Czechoslovakia as that country's theoretically self-governing province of *Subcarpathian Rus'*. The Paris Peace Conference accepted the Czechoslovak solution only on the condition that all "Rusyns living south of the Carpathian" (that is, within the present-day borders of Slovakia as well as Ukraine) would enjoy self-rule, or autonomy. When the first Czechoslovak republic ceased to exist after the Munich Pact of September 1938, the new regime in Prague did finally grant full autonomy to *Subcarpathian Rus'*, which also became known as Carpatho-Ukraine. Even the subsequent World War II government of Horthy's Hungary, which forcibly annexed *Subcarpathian Rus'*/Carpatho-Ukraine in March 1939, proposed giving its new Rusyn-inhabited region, called Kárpátalja, some degree of autonomy. None, however, was ever provided. Finally, when the Hungarians were driven out by the Soviet Army in 1944, the local inhabitants created a self-governing entity called Transcarpathian Ukraine (*Zakarpats'ka Ukra'na*), which proclaimed a desire to join the Soviet Ukraine.

The point of this brief historical excursion is to make clear that Transcarpathia's very existence as a distinct territorial entity is based on two historical factors: (1) the numerical dominance of an indigenous Rusyn / Ukrainian population; and (2) the understanding in international circles that the region exists as a distinct territory because it is inhabited by Rusyns who have a right to some form of self-rule. In this context, it is not surprising that when the latest political change took place during the second half of 1991, as the Soviet Union collapsed and an independent Ukraine came into existence, that Ukraine's future first president, Leonid Kravchuk, proposed a referendum on self-rule (autonomy) for Transcarpathia be held on December 1 as part of the referendum on Ukraine's independence and in conjunction with the independent country's first presidential elections. The result was that 78 percent of the region's inhabitants voted in favour of self-rule / autonomy.

What we see in hindsight is quite clear: during the first half of the twentieth century, every new country that came to rule Transcarpathia – Károlyi and Kun's Hungary, Masaryk and Beneš' Czechoslovakia, Horthy's Hungary – began by promising self-rule, but non was able or willing to allow the region's inhabitants to govern themselves. One is prompted to ask why such



different regimes all seemed to act in the same way? Is it because those countries never really felt they had a right to rule in Transcarpathia?

The country that allows self-rule for its regions is able to do so, because it has the confidence and respect of its citizens. In that sense, just as Spain can have its self-governing Catalonia and Basque land, Italy its Sicily and Friulia, the United Kingdom its Scotland and Wales, so too can Ukraine survive and even flourish with self-governing regions like the Crimea and Transcarpathia.

In any discussion about the present and immediate future, we should keep in mind that, like most of Ukraine, Transcarpathia's main problems are of an economic nature. Faced with such enormous economic difficulties, one should not be naive to believe that autonomy is in itself a kind of panacea that would suddenly transform the economic situation by automatically bringing jobs and prosperity to the region. On the other hand, there is enough current experience throughout other parts of Europe to suggest that regions who determine their own economic and cultural affairs often do no worse and even better in improving their livelihood than do countries with such policies set by far-away central governments.

Regardless of how the historic reality of Transcarpathia's political distinctiveness is addressed in the future by the government of Ukraine, the multinational aspect of the region will not change. Transcarpathia's numerous peoples will continue to live and work alongside and together with each other in this land. In the final analysis, the degree to which Transcarpathia's peoples have been successful in peacefully co-existing is not something they have learned from anyone else. Rather, their achievement in sustaining fruitful multinational co-existence is something that other Europeans can learn from them.

Roquebrune-Cap Martin  
August 1998