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UKR42354.E

Ukraine: Treatment of Carpatho-Rusyns by authorities and society; state protection
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The Rusyn community is located in the Transcarpathia Oblast (Zakarpats'kia) of Ukraine, formerly known as Subcarpathian Rus' (Pidkarpatska Rus) (CER 20 Nov. 2000). While Ruthenian, Carpathian, Carpatho-Rusyn (*Ethnologue* 2000), Carpatho-Russian, Carpatho-Ukrainian, Rusnak, Ruthene and Uhro-Rusyn are alternate names for the minority, "the most appropriate designation," according to the Rusyn International Media Center (RIMC) "is Carpatho-Rusyn, or simply Rusyn" (2003a, 2). Ukraine also hosts a small community of Lemko Rusyns originally from the Lemko region of Poland (RIMC 2003a, 1).

Demographics

Although recognized as a minority community of Serbia-Montenegro, Croatia, Hungary, Romania, Poland and Slovakia, the group is not recognized as such by the Ukrainian government (CER 20 Nov. 2000). Upon the ratification of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages on 6 June 2003, Ukraine did not include this group among its 13 designated languages (ITAR-TASS 6 June 2003).

According to Ukrainian researcher Taras Kuzio, there is no official statistical information estimating the size of the Rusyn population in Ukraine and the 2001 Ukrainian census did not permit citizens to choose Rusyn as their ethnic identity (RFE/RL 14 Jan. 2003). A 2003 review of the Ukrainian census results published by the Warsaw-based Center for Eastern Studies' (CES) did not list Rusyn in either the official nationality or language population estimates (CES 9 Jan. 2003). According to representatives of the Rusyn diaspora in the United States, Ukrainian census takers were given instructions to not accept (RONA 23 Aug. 2003, 7), or to otherwise discourage claims to Rusyn nationality in the census (*The Washington Times* 27 Oct. 2003). Despite this claim, since the publication of the CES report, two Rusyn organizations reported that Ukrainian authorities have acknowledged a Rusyn population of approximately 10,000 individuals (RIMC 2003b; RONA 23 Aug. 2003, 7).

Unofficial estimates of the Rusyn population in the Transcarpathian region report between 600,000 and 800,000 persons (*Washington Times* 27 Oct. 2003; RIMC 2003a, 1; *ibid.* 2003b; *ibid.* 2003c, 1; UNPO n.d.; RFE/RL 14 Jan. 2003; *ibid.* 28 June 1999; CER 20 Nov. 2000). The official 2001 population of region is

1,258,000 people (Law 20 June 2003); therefore, Rusyn would make up dominant ethnic group in Transcarpathia (CER 20 Nov. 2000; RIMC 2003c). According to RIMC estimates from 1990, the largest concentrations of the minority are in the cities of Užhorod (117,000 persons) and Mukachevo (86,000 persons), while Chust, Berehovo, Vynohradiv, Svaljava, Rachiv and Tjaciv have populations of between 10,000 and 35,000 people (2003a, 2).

Treatment

Members of the Rusyn community claim that the Ukrainian government is perpetrating a deliberate campaign of forced assimilation of the minority (RIMC 2003b; RONA 23 Aug. 2003, 7). In a 2003 letter to the editor of *The Washington Times*, Thomas A. Brenzovich, president of the United States chapter of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society, called Ukrainian policies "a long-standing ... effort to assimilate Carpatho-Rusyns and to destroy their religious, linguistic and cultural heritage (*Washington Times* 27 Oct. 2003).

According to Rusyn claims, Ukraine is acting for nationalistic and/or financial reasons, for example to avoid paying for cultural programs (RONA 23 Aug. 2003, 7; RIMC 2003b). Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) however offers political reasons, citing other ethnic problems among Ukraine's abundant minority populations, it argued that the country sought to avoid "open[ing] what seems to be a Pandora's box of ethnic demands for more rights and concessions" (RFE/RL 11 Jan. 2000). *Central Europe Review* reporter Brian J. Požun concluded similarly in 2000 (20 Nov. 2000). Several reports cite a 1996 document published for the State Committee of Ukraine Dealing with Nationalities and Emigration entitled "Plan of Measures in Respect to Resolving Problems of Ukrainians-Rusyns (CER 20 Nov. 2000; RIMC 2003b; RONA 23 Aug. 2003, 7). Požun reported that although the measures were never fully implemented, "'Rusyns are Ukrainians' propaganda campaigns" were instituted in Ukraine and in neighbouring Eastern European countries to counter Rusyn arguments (CER 20 Nov. 2000). Among the plans listed in this document, according to two unofficial translations provided on the Lemko.org and the Legacyrus.org online depositories of Rusyn documentation, the Committee recommended sponsoring an academic study to challenge Rusyn claims (Lemko.org n.d., Sec. 5-6; Legacyrus.org n.d., Sec. 5-6). The Chair of the Ukrainian Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights and Ethnic Minorities, Hennadiy Udovenko, reiterated this recommendation in a 2000 interview with *Kievskiy Vedomosti* (14 June 2000).

Because Rusyn is an unrecognized minority population in Ukraine, the group is not officially differentiated from the general Ukrainian population and not accorded any additional rights (CER 20 Nov. 2000). The Rusyn language is considered a "backward" Ukrainian dialect (ibid.) and believed, as argued by Udovenko in 2000, to be "one of the branches of the Ukrainian nation like Hutsuls, Boykos and Lemkys" (*Kievskiy Vedomosti* 14 June 2000). As a result, it is not taught in schools and Rusyn-language media is provided no government funding (CER 20 Nov. 2000).

Until its suspension in early January 2000 (RFE/RL 11 Jan. 2000), local Rusyn leaders had formed the "Provisional Government for the Republic of Subcarpathian Rus," within which its National Council strived to obtain recognition as a regional self-government (UNPO n.d.; RIMC 2003a, 5). *Political Parties of Eastern Europe* also refers to a Society of Carpathian Rusyns (Spilka Karpatskyh Rusyniv, SKR in Ukrainian) which sought autonomy in the 1990s (2002, 963). The power of these institutions was limited according to RFE/RL

Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report editor Jan Maksymiuk who stated in 2000 that it had no "opportunities to govern anything anywhere in a political sense" (RFE/RL 11 Jan. 2000), This point was also made by Požun in 2000 (CER 20 Nov. 2000) and Kuzio in 2003-the latter arguing that no Ruysn movements had received significant support in regional elections of the 1990s (RFE/RL 14 Jan. 2003). In addition, Požun noted that

[t]he fact that Trans-Carpathia has not experienced any significant degree of ethnic intolerance or radical nationalist movements may well be due to the fact that the Rusyns, as the largest group in the region, pride themselves on their "Peaceful Rusyn Way..."

The Rusyn national conscious holds peacefulness as one of its main tenants, and throughout the ten-year struggle for recognition and autonomy, the Rusyns have never attempted to achieve their goals through violence (CER 20 Nov. 2000).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies

Carpatho-Rusyn Society (Pittsburgh)

Journal of Ukrainian Studies

Encyclopedia of Ukraine (Online)

The New Rusyn Times [Pittsburgh]

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