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LEMKO REGION – HISTORICAL REGION IN THE POLISH-SLOVAKIAN BORDERLAND

1. THE ORIGIN OF THE LEMKO PEOPLE AND THE TERM “LEMKO”

The term “Lemko” appeared in the early 19th century. It is a local, folk nickname, introduced to the scientific literature by the Boikos to describe their western, Ruthenian neighbours. It was promoted in the 19th century by the Slovakian and Polish ethnographers, but has not been recognized among the Ruthenian people for a long time. It was not until the interwar period, when it was commonly accepted by the Ruthenians, on the northern side of the Carpathian Mountains (Reinfuss, 1990; Czajkowski, 1992). However, on the Slovakian side, the term “Lemko” is actually not recognized by the Ruthenians, who call themselves “Rusyns” or “Rusnaks”. This does not change the fact, that ethnically, culturally and religiously, the Ruthenian people living on both sides of the Carpathian Mountains, both the Polish Lemkos and the Slovakian Rusnaks constitute the same group (Sapoliga, 1992). The Ruthenian people, living in the northern Carpathians, are also described as the Carpatho-Ruthenians (Magocsi, 2002; Michna, 2004).

The historians and ethnographers, basing on the scientific research, consider Lemkos (Rusnaks) as immigrants, who arrived among the Polish and the Slovakian people in the northern Carpathians. According to this theory, the ancestors of the Lemkos came to this area relatively late, along with the Vlach-Ruthenian settlement movement between the late 14th and early 15th century. The colonization progressed along the main Carpathian mountain range, from the area of today’s Romania, to the north and to the west (Reinfuss, 1990; Czajkowski, 1992).

The modern Lemko (Ruthenian) people are an ethnic group, which was

shaped in a long, historical process, accepting and assimilating different national elements. It was influenced by both, Polish and Slovakian settlers, as well as Vlach shepherds. The most influence, however, came from the Ruthenian settlement, which in the 15th and 16th centuries dominated the abovementioned ethnic groups, assimilating them with language and, to a large extent, with culture, at the same time adopting some features from them, e.g. local geographical names or highland herding type. A separate language¹, religion and culture distinguished the Lemko (Ruthenian) people from the neighbouring Polish, Slovakian and Hungarian people. The Lemkos, although internally divided into a number of local groups, have always had the sense of separateness (Reinfuss, 1990).

2. HISTORICAL, ETHNIC, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL DETERMINANTS OF THE SHAPING OF THE LEMKO REGION

Most of the villages in the northern Carpathians were founded before the end of the 16th century. It was then, when the ethnic and cultural border between the Polish and the Ruthenian people appeared and lived on until the mid-1940s. The Lemkos inhabited the compact area of the Low Beskids (Beskid Niski) and the Krynicka Beskids (Beskid Krynicki), from the Poprad River in the west to the source of the Solinka River in the east. This westernmost area inhabited by the Ruthenians has been later named Lemko Region. This name was only adopted in the Polish part of the Carpathian Mountains. Lemko Region had all the features of the historically shaped, separate anthropogenic region, distinguished from the surroundings ethnically, culturally and economically. It was a region, ethnically dominated by the Lemkos for hundreds of years. The scarce Polish, Slovakian, German and Jewish population inhabited only a few towns of the region (Fig. 1) (Reinfuss, 1990; Czajkowski, 1992).

In Slovakia, the difference between the Ruthenians and the Slovaks was not as visible as in Poland. Vast transition areas were present in this

¹ The Lemko language is a dialect of Ukrainian language. It is distinguished by numerous archaic expressions and a large number of foreign influences, mainly Polish and Slovakian. The most important feature of the Lemko dialect, distinguishing it from other Ukrainian dialects, is the fixed accent on the penultimate syllable, just like in Polish and Slovakian languages, while the accent in Ukrainian language is flexible (Reinfuss, 1990).

area, where ethnically Slovakian, Ruthenian and mixed villages coexisted. It can be assumed, that the area of Ruthenian settlement in the Slovakian part of the Carpathians stretched in a belt, 30 kilometres long, along the Polish border (with the exception of the Slovakian “wedge” near Bardejov), between the rivers Cirocha and Laborec in the east and the village of Velki Lipnik in the west. The southern border was zonal, with Ruthenian and Slovakian settlement movement infiltrating each other (Fig. 1) (Sapoliga, 1992; Magosci, 2002).

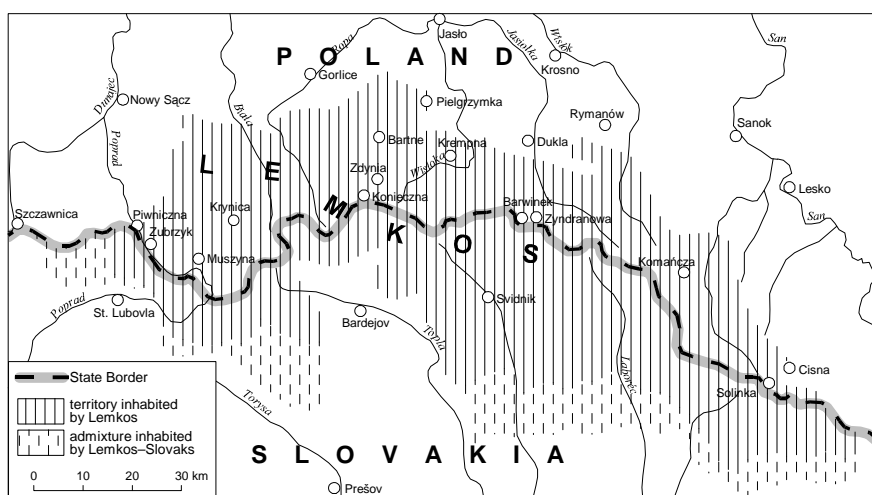


Fig. 1. Area inhabited by the Lemkos (Rusnaks) in the Polish-Slovakian borderland (as per 1944)

Source: R. Reinfuss (1990, p. 14)

Lemko Region, as a separate region, started to shape in the period of the partitions of Poland, between the 18th and 19th centuries. It resulted from the cancelation of the historical state borders between the Republic of Poland and the Habsburg Monarchy, shaped in the medieval times and replacing them with the internal border of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Nowakowski, 1992).

However, even earlier, in the 15th–18th centuries, the mountain ranges and the border between Poland and Hungary were not an obstacle for mutual contacts between Ruthenian people from both, the Polish and the Slovakian part of the Carpathian Mountains. The shepherds from the south tended their flocks of sheep and built shelters in the northern forests and the groups of villains consisted of brigands from both, the south and the north. In the 18th century, after the Cossack wars in Poland, many peasants fled Poland,

fearing retribution from the nobility, and settled in Hungary (Reinfuss, 1987, 1992).

Seeking better living conditions in the southern part of the Carpathians was a phenomenon also known in the years to come. Climatic differences resulted in the Lemkos working in farming in the lowland areas. Before World War I, they worked in agriculture for the nobles almost exclusively from Slovakia, where working conditions and pay were much better than in Galicia, being under the Austrian partition (Reinfuss, 1987, 1992; Sapoliga, 1992).

The northern Carpathians were crossed by trade routes connecting mountain Galician towns (Biecz, Dukle, Grybów, Gorlice) with Slovakian towns, especially Bardejov and Košice. The transport of goods was mostly handled by the local, Lemko peasantry. They developed wandering trade, which largely influenced the mutual contacts among the inhabitants from both sides of the Carpathians. Before World War I, they even reached Budapest and further, beyond the Danube River, together with their wares. However, it was the barter trade that was more significant than wandering trade. The barter took place in mountain towns, mainly in Slovakia, where the Lemko people traded agricultural goods in exchange for craft wares. The main trade centres south of the Carpathian Mountains included Stará L'ubovna, Bardejov, Stropkov and Svidník.

The southern Lemkos (Rusnaks) did not visit their northern neighbours so frequently. Apart from wood and masonry goods, the purchased wares included wooden houses, which were disassembled and built anew in Slovakia. Such houses, the so called *poloks*, can still be found nowadays in some of the borderland villages in Slovakia (Reinfuss, 1992).

The religious life was also an important factor, influencing the shaping of folk culture. After Greek Catholic Church was introduced – which happened relatively late in Lemko Region, at the end of the 17th c. and with great reluctance – the entire Lemko (Ruthenian) population was Greek Catholic. The most important cultural centre was located in the Krásny Brod monastery in Slovakia. Another important pilgrimage centre was located in Bokovska Horka (near Stropkov) with its monastery. The church fairs in these localities were frequented by Greek Catholic people from both sides of the Carpathian Mountains.

Family and social contacts were also very important and influenced largely the mutual diffusion of customs and traditions on both sides of the Carpathian range. All the events, related to family life, such as weddings,

baptisms and even funerals, gave the excuse for trips and visits to the neighbours from across the mountains.

The large variety of mutual contacts among the Lemko people before the World War I gave the opportunity for getting to know each other and the comparison, which clearly showed the superiority of the southern Lemkos (Rusnaks). They impressed the northern Lemkos with their wealth and culture and this resulted in adopting various patterns. The rank of the Galician Lemkos was not high enough in the eyes of their southern counterparts, which created a barrier for the infiltration of the northern cultural patterns to the south (Reinfuss, 1992).

The 19th c. and the early 20th century were the most favourable period for the mutual contacts of the northern and the southern Lemkos. Living within one state, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and being separated only by an internal, administrative border did not cause any major limitations for mutual contacts. Such favourable conditions have never occurred after 1918.

The outcome of World War I foreshadowed the end of free contacts between the northern and the southern Lemkos. This resulted in negative consequences, especially for the northern Lemkos, who were economically linked with Slovakia and Hungary, mainly through seasonal farming work and barter trade. That is why after the end of the war the Lemkos became politically active, striving to protect their future in economic, social and national terms (Kwilecki, 1970).

On 5th December 1918, during a political rally organized by the Lemko political activists of the Russophile option, in the village of Florynka, in the Polish part of the Carpathians, the birth of the Ruthenian National Republic of the Lemko People (*Ruska Narodowa Republika Łemków*) was proclaimed. The Republic's influence was limited only to the western part of the Lemko Region. The Ruthenian Councils (*Russkie Rady*) were established in Gładyszów, Śnietnica and Krynica. These councils established laws, issued regulations and instructions, but their true power was not of major significance (Nowakowski, 1992).

The Lemko activists, united within the Republic did not speak one voice, as far as the future of the region was concerned. The only thing in common was the drive to create the undivided Lemko Region, as an autonomous social-political entity or as a whole, within one state. The concept of connecting the entire Lemko Region to Czechoslovakia was the most popular one. Another popular idea was to create "one great Ruthenian state", which would include the Lemkos. However, this could not be implemented due to the outbreak of the Russian Revolution and inability to make contact with the

authorities of the Soviet Russia (Kwilecki, 1970; Nowakowski, 1992; Michna, 1995).

At the same time, the Ruthenian National Councils already operated in Slovakia, in the towns of Prešov, Užhorod and Chust. Each of them had different plans for its future. The Prešov council wanted to be annexed to Slovakia, the Užhorod council wanted autonomy within Hungary and the council in Chust wanted to be incorporated to Ukraine. On 21st December 1918, in Prešov, the Carpatho-Ruthenian National Council (*Karpato-Ruska Narodowa Rada*) was established, incorporating the Ruthenian National Republic of the Lemko People from the Polish part of the Carpathians. In May 1919, the president of the Carpatho-Ruthenian National Council issued a request to President Masaryk for the incorporation of the so-called "Galician Lemko Region" to Czechoslovakia. The authorities in Prague did not take up this topic, fearing armed conflict with Poland.

The Polish government, anxious about the Carpathian events, decided to counteract. The leaders of the *Republika* were arrested and the border was manned by the Carpathian border guard in order to prevent smuggling and the flow of people, including the Czech agitators. Finally, *Ruska Narodowa Republika Łemków* was disestablished at the end of March 1920 (Nowakowski, 1992; Michna, 1995).

While in western Lemko Region, the Russophile *Ruska Narodowa Republika Łemków* was being established, in the eastern Lemko Region the pro-Ukrainian *Komańcza Republic* (*Republika Komańczańska*) was being born. The republic was established during the Polish-Ukrainian fights for Lvov and the proclamation of the Western-Ukrainian People's Republic in Lvov. It was disestablished by the Polish army in January 1919. The refugees from the *Republika* found shelter in Slovakia and Ukraine (Reinfuss, 1990; Nowakowski, 1992; Michna, 1995).

These events showed that the Lemkos have a strong need to decide about their fate and a feeling of identity with their fellow Ruthenians from the south and strive for the independence of the Lemko ethnic area. The establishment of Lemko republics was a manifestation of the national independence movements within the Lemko community.

After a truce treaty between Poland and the Soviet Russia in 1921, Polish authorities started to get the internal affairs organized within the state structures. In Lemko Region, it was decided that desertion will be put to an end and the security at the Polish-Czechoslovakian border will be tightened. Border security outposts were established, borderland area was delimited and the strict residential rules for this zone were introduced. These actions

significantly limited smuggling activities and illegal border crossings, but at the same time, separated the northern Lemkos from their families and professional contacts among the Ruthenians in Slovakia (Nowakowski, 1992). Since that moment the border along the Carpathian range became a barrier for the interpersonal contacts and, with small exceptions, continued so until the early 1990s.

3. THE CHANGES IN THE DISTRIBUTION AND QUANTITY OF THE LEMKOS (RUTHENIANS) AFTER WORLD WAR II AND THE SITUATION IN LEMKO REGION DURING THE COMMUNIST PERIOD

During World War II, the northern Lemko Region was entirely under the Nazi occupation, while the Prešov Region was incorporated into the newly created, pro-fascist Slovakian state. For the Lemkos living in occupied Poland it was the beginning of the three waves of displacements, which outlived the settlement continuity of this region and completely and irreversibly changed its ethnic-religious structure.

In November 1939, the then-allied authorities of Nazi Germany and Soviet Union signed a treaty on the exchange of Ukrainian and Byelorussian people, living in the General Government, with German people, willing to relocate from the USSR into the German Reich. As a result of the Soviet commissioners' agitation in years 1940–1941, approximately 25 thousand Lemkos voluntarily agreed to relocate. In fact, only about 5 thousand of them left for the USSR, as the rest decided to stay after having heard about the Soviet reality from the Ukrainian refugees (Nowakowski, 1992). Despite this displacement and the frontline events, the World War II years did not bring significant demographic changes in the Lemko Region. Paradoxically, the most tragic events for the Lemko people came after this region had been freed from the Nazi occupation.

In years 1944–1946, the Lemkos were once again dislocated, this time on a much larger scale. The displacement movement was conducted, based on the treaty between the Polish communist authorities and the authorities of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic. As a consequence, approximately 480–488 thousand Ukrainians (including approx. 70 thousand Lemkos²) were

² R. Drozd (2007) estimates that 95 thousand Lemkos were displaced, but this number is overestimated due to the included people from the Sanok District, totalling

relocated from Poland to Soviet Ukraine. It was assumed that the relocation is voluntary, but after a couple of months it took the form of a repressive deportation, enforced by the Polish military. The communist authorities wanted to convert Poland into a single-nationality state. That is why after seizing power in 1944, they decided to “get rid” of the national minorities, especially the Ukrainian minority. During this period, Polish authorities treated the Ukrainians and the Lemkos as one group. Therefore, all the restrictions concerning the Ukrainians had touched the Lemko people as well. The displacement of the Lemkos to USSR brought a breakthrough for their ethnic, political and territorial condition. A vast majority was placed within the Ukrainian borders, while the minority of their population was in Poland. Eventually, in the late 1946, as a result of post-war displacements, the Northern Carpathians were populated by only 30–35 thousand Lemkos, out of approx. 110 thousand, who had inhabited this area before World War II (Kwilecki, 1970; Nyczanka, 1987; Reinfuss, 1990; Misiło, 1992; Pudło, 1992; Drozd, 2007; Dudra, 2008; Eberhardt, 2010).

The third and the last stage of the Lemkos’ displacement took place in 1947. It was a part of the military “Operation Wisła” (Vistula), which involved the compulsory relocation of all the Ukrainian citizens inhabiting Poland into the so-called “regained territories”, the northern and western lands, annexed to Poland after the war. “Operation Wisła” had two main goals: military and political. The military goal involved elimination of the Ukrainian armed resistance. It covered the entire Lemko Region, despite the fact that UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Forces), were not actively operating in this region, especially in the western part. However, the main goal was political in its nature, which was “the ultimate solution of the Ukrainian problem” in Poland, through displacement and intentional dispersion of the Ukrainian population in northern and western Poland. This was supposed to force Ukrainians to assimilate and “Polonize”, which actually meant the end of Ukrainian minority³ (Drozd, 2007; Dudra, 2008).

The displacement involved all the “Ukrainian-speaking” people from south-eastern Poland (Ukrainians, Lemkos, Boikos), all considered as Ukrainians by the authorities, including the members of mixed families. Approximately 140–150 thousand Ukrainians including about 30–35 thousand Lemkos were displaced, leading to a complete removal of these

approximately 42 thousand people, where Ukrainian nationality dominated.

³ This thesis is questioned, among others, by L. Olejnik (2003), with an emphasis on the significance of destroying the base and the structures of the Ukrainian underground.

minorities in south-eastern Poland (Nyczanka, 1987; Żurko, 1997; Drozd, 1998, 2007; Dudra, 2008; Reinfuss, 1990; Miśiło, 1992; Eberhardt, 2010).

The 1947 displacement, as opposed to the ones from 1944–1946, did not result in the decrease of the Lemko population in Poland, although it drastically influenced their spatial distribution. The 1944–1947 displacements irreversibly destroyed the specific national, religious and cultural features of Lemko Region. A complete change in the ethnic and religious relations, which had lasted for hundreds of years within this region, took place. As a result of displacements, during a few years, people who had lived in one region for generations were allocated in two countries, covering the area from the Dnieper River to the Odra River. The displacements also changed the ethnic, religious, language and cultural structure of north-western Poland. The presence of the Ukrainian and Lemko people in this region is just a consequence of the political decisions of 1947 (Barwiński, 2002, 2008, 2009).

These events did not result in rapid repopulation of Lemko Region. It remained depopulated for quite some time. In the area of approx. 4000 km² (Beskid Niski and Bieszczady Mountains) over 320 villages became deserted, some of them even ceased to exist. The territories abandoned by the Lemkos were repopulated by the Polish settlers, mainly from nearby villages and partly from the USSR territory. However, the resettlement movement progressed very slowly. Even the incentives for the Polish settlers did not manage to fill the “settlement emptiness” in the Carpathian Mountains. According to the 1950 national census, Lemko Region was inhabited by only 31.1 thousand people. Comparing to the pre-war figures, the region lost 71% of its entire population. Not only did the displacements break its demographic continuity but also its economic dimension. The average population density in the countryside decreased by 50% and almost 25% of all the villages were uninhabited in 1950 (Soja, 2001).

After the political transformations of 1956, the Lemkos hoped that the authorities would declare the 1947 displacement and “Operation Wisła” illegal and cancel the 1949 decree, which deprived them of their possessions, lands and forests in the Carpathian Mountains. They also hoped for compensation money from the government and resettlement to their original territories. Unfortunately, this did not happen, although a number of Lemkos returned to their “ethnic motherland”. The number of returning Lemkos would have probably been higher, if it had not been for the preventive actions of the local administration and the fact that those, willing to return, could not possibly hope for regaining their houses and lands. The

homecoming was the easiest for those, whose farms were not already inhabited by the Polish settlers. The others had to repurchase their properties (Pudło, 1992; Drozd, 1998). In the end, no more than approx. 2 thousand Lemkos returned home in years 1956–198 (Reinfuss, 1990). In the following years, the number increased gradually to the maximum of 5000 (Žurko, 1997).

During the entire communist period (1945–1989), Polish authorities discriminated the Lemkos and did not acknowledge their separateness, identifying them as Ukrainians. It was not even allowed to use the term “Lemkos” as a name for a separate ethnic or minority group, thus forcing the Lemkos to form their associations within the already established Ukrainian organizations (Barwiński, 2008).

After 1947, the mutual contacts between Polish and Slovakian Lemkos almost entirely stopped. The main reasons behind this phenomenon included the displacements in the northern Carpathians, the restraints of Stalin’s regime and strict administrative regulations, limiting the cross-border movement, even between the communist sister-states.

On the Slovakian side of the Carpathian Mountains, the Ruthenian people were not displaced after World War II and their number was estimated at 100 thousand. It happened only in 1946, by the power of the Czechoslovakian-Soviet treaty, when Czechs and Slovaks from USSR were relocated to Czechoslovakia in exchange for the Ruthenians, who were displaced from Slovakia to Ukraine. This displacement, although influenced by strong propaganda, was only voluntary. Approximately 12,000 Slovakian Ruthenians had used this opportunity. However, after disappointment with economic situation in USSR, most of them managed to return to Czechoslovakia in the 1960s (Mušynka, 1993).

After the displacements in southern Poland, the term *Lemko* was almost entirely forgotten in eastern Slovakia. It was largely related to the Slovakian Lemkos’ fear of sharing the fate of the Polish Lemkos. In the southern Carpathians the traditional terms, such as *Rusin* or *Rusnak* still dominated. However, in the early 1950s, these terms were officially changed by the communist Czechoslovakian authorities to the ethnonym *Ukrainiec* (Eng. Ukrainian), which became the only official term for the Ruthenian people in the Carpathians. Some Ruthenians declared Slovakian nationality in the coming national censuses, as a protest against considering them as Ukrainians. In 1930, in the Prešov Region the Ruthenian nationality was declared by 91 thousand people, while in the 1961 census, when only Slovakian or Ukrainian nationalities were allowed (declaring Ruthenian

nationality was banned), the latter was declared by only 33,000 people. It clearly shows the protest of the Ruthenians against the government-enforced process of their “Ukrainisation”, as well as the progressing phenomenon of assimilation with Slovaks. Both factors contributed to the decrease of number of Ruthenians, living in the southern Carpathians. The 1968 events of the so-called “Prague Spring” brought hope for more freedom for the Slovakian Ruthenians. However, these hopes soon proved to be futile (Mušynka, 1993; Magocsi, 2002).

In the 1970s, the administrative regulations became slightly more liberal. However, it did not improve the mutual contact opportunities for both Lemko groups in any significant way. The cross-border movement regulations were still very strict in the European communist countries. It was hard to obtain a passport and even when entering Poland or Slovakia, special invitations were required. In the entire Lemko Region, which was approx. 150 km long, there were only two road border crossings and one railway crossing. Both, Polish and Slovakian authorities did not acknowledge the ethnic separateness of the Lemko (Ruthenian) people, still identifying them as Ukrainian minority. This hindered the attempts to establish any cultural cooperation. Moreover, the number of the Lemkos in the northern Carpathians was marginal, due to numerous displacements. All this significantly limited the mutual contacts between the Lemko people living in Poland and Slovakia.

The political situation in Poland and Czechoslovakia in years 1945–1989, especially displacements of the Lemkos and tightening the national border security, resulted in division and isolation of the Ruthenian inhabitants in the Carpathians, in terms of ethnicity as well as social, cultural and economic life. This phenomenon has never occurred before on such a large scale.

4. THE LEMKO REGION AFTER 1989

In administrative terms, the situation improved after 1989, which is the date, when central European countries regained their full independence. In the early 1990s, the problems with crossing the Carpathian border have ended. The passports became easily obtainable and citizens of Poland and Slovakia (including the Lemkos) did not need any visas or invitations anymore. New border crossings and fixed bus connections between Polish and Slovakian towns were established. In the 1990s, these improvements enhanced the trans-border trade, which in Lemko Region did not develop

directly by the border crossings, but instead – in nearby larger towns. It resulted from a relatively low population density in the border belt.

Another important change in political and administrative situation took place in 2004 and was directly related to Poland's and Slovakia's accession to European Union and three years later, also to the so-called Schengen Zone. Since 21st December 2007, the border control between Poland and Slovakia was completely removed, at the same time allowing free flow of people across the Carpathian border. For the first time in many years, the border stopped being a barrier and contact opportunities between the southern and northern Lemkos became the easiest in history, at least from administrative and communication perspective.

Nowadays, the Lemkos meet in large numbers during various Lemko cultural festivals. Since many years, thousands of Ruthenians from Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine meet at the annual Lemko Culture Festival (*Łemkowska Watra*) in Zdynia. The *Rusnalia* event in Zyndranowa is just as popular.

The fall of communism and political changes enabled the initiatives for real trans-border cooperation. In 1993, the Union of Tourist-Health Resort Communes in Krynica was established. This organization clustered Carpathian communes from both, Poland and Slovakia. Moreover, in 1993 the south-eastern Polish provinces, along with their counterparts from Ukraine, Slovakia and Hungary, formed the Carpathian Euroregion. Nowadays, the entire area inhabited by the Lemkos (with the exception of western Lemko Region), both in Poland and Slovakia, belongs to the Carpathian Euroregion.

However, it was the political and legal changes in the early 1990s that proved to be more important than the administrative, communication and economic transformations. The political changes, in Poland and Slovakia alike, enabled freedom and self-determination to all ethnic minorities. After so many years of administrative identification of all Ruthenians as Ukrainians, the Lemkos and the Rusnaks could finally decide about their national identity themselves. It resulted in creation of multiple, frequently competitive, Ruthenian organisations and in clear distinction of the Lemkos from Poles, Slovaks and Ukrainians.

The first, post-war Lemko organisation in Poland was the Lemko Association (*Stowarzyszenie Łemków*), registered in 1989 in Legnica. It had a pro-Lemko, national orientation. The main goals of this organisation included the integration of the Lemkos, maintaining and developing Lemko national identity, culture, tradition and language. In 1991, the first meeting of the Lemko Union (*Zjednoczenie Łemków*) took place in Gorlice. This organisation functioned with a pro-Ukrainian orientation. Although many

other organisations were established in the coming years⁴, the two aforementioned ones are the largest Lemko organisations in Poland. The competition between them is a reflection of a clear national dualism among the Lemkos, which has been clearly visible since the late 19th century.

Since 20 years, the main postulates of the Lemko organisations in Poland include correcting moral and material wrongs, resulting from “Operation Wisła” and cancellation of its legal results. In most cases, these requirements have not been met (Dudra, 2009).

In 1991, the Lemko Association was one of the initiators of the World Ruthenian Congress in Medzilaborce (Slovakia). During the congress, the World Ruthenian Council was elected. The council still functions nowadays and consists of Ruthenian activists from Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Ukraine, Hungary, Romania, Serbia and USA. The World Ruthenian Congress is held every two years, promoting the concept of the Carpatho-Ruthenian nation and Carpathian Ruthenia as a common motherland of all the Ruthenians⁵.

In Slovakia, among the Rusnaks, the similar, Ruthenian-Ukrainian, national dualism as in Poland can be observed. It is reflected in their organisational structure and activities. After 1990, apart from pro-Ukrainian organisations, such as “Slovakian Ukrainian Association” or “Slovakian Ruthenian-Ukrainian Union” (*Zväz Rusínov-Ukrajincov Slovenskej Republiky*), the pro-Ruthenian organisations started to emerge, among them “Ruthenian Revival” (*Rusinska Obroda*) and “Slovakian Ruthenian Intelligentsia Association”.

The main event of the Slovakian Ruthenians and the counterpart of the Polish *Lemkowska Watra*, is the annual “Cultural Festival of the Ruthenian-Ukrainians in Slovakia” in Svidnik. The Aleksander Dukhnovich Ruthenian National Theatre in Prešov (*Divadlo Alexandra Duchnoviča*) is another important cultural institution for the Slovakian Ruthenians.

Currently, there are no common Polish-Slovakian Ruthenian organisations. The only cooperation platform for the Ruthenian activists is the World Ruthenian Council. The Leaders of different Lemko, Ruthenian and Ukrainian organisations from Poland and Slovakia meet during cultural

⁴ Other Lemko organizations, established after 1989, include: Ruthenian Democratic Circle of Lemkos “Hospodar”, “Ruska Bursa” Association, Foundation for Support of the Lemko Minority “Rutenika”, Association for Preservation of the Cultural Heritage of the Lemkos “Terka”, Lemko Youth Association “Czucha” and many folk bands (Dudra, 2009).

⁵ Based on www.stowarzyszenielemkow.pl

events, festivals and scientific conferences, but focus mainly on the minority groups within their own countries.

5. THE NUMBER AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE LEMKOS (RUTHENIANS) IN THE CARPATHIAN MOUNTAINS, ACCORDING TO THE RESULTS OF NATIONAL CENSUSES IN THE EARLY 21ST CENTURY

Despite the assimilation processes (Polonisation and Slovakisation), which progressed during the last years among the Lemko (Ruthenian) people, this was not reflected in various, unofficial estimations of the total number of their population.

In the early 1990s, in Slovakia, the number of Ruthenians was estimated at over 150 thousand people, inhabiting approx. 220 municipalities and villages in 6 different districts: Humenné, Svidnik, Bardejov, Prešov, Vranov, Stará Ľubovňa (Sapoliga, 1992). At the same time, the number of Lemkos, living strongly dispersed both in western and northern Poland as well as in Lemko Region, was estimated, according to different sources, at 60–80 thousand people (Žurko, 1997; Chałupczak and Browarek, 1998; Łodziński, 2005; Barwiński, 2006, 2009).

The estimations were “painfully” verified during the national censuses, conducted in Poland and Slovakia in the early 21st century.

The area inhabited by the Ruthenians (Rusnaks) in Slovakia does not have a specific name, related to its people as in case of Lemko Region, in the Polish part of the Carpathians, nor does it have the exactly outlined borders. The most frequent term used in scientific publications is “Prešov Region”. It is an administrative unit, which has the rank of a Polish province.

According to the last national census in Slovakia, conducted in 2001, the Ruthenian nationality was declared by 24,201 people, while Ukrainian – by only 10814, which is much less than the previous estimations indicated. In the Prešov Region, which entirely includes the area historically inhabited by the Rusnaks, the Ruthenian nationality was declared by 21,150 people, while Ukrainian – by 6781. This proves that the region is still the largest cluster of Ruthenian community in Slovakia. The largest share of Ruthenian and Ukrainian people – between 10 and 45% of the total population – was reported in the border districts of Svidnik, Medzilaborce and Snina⁶ (Fig. 2).

⁶ Based on <http://portal.statistics.sk>

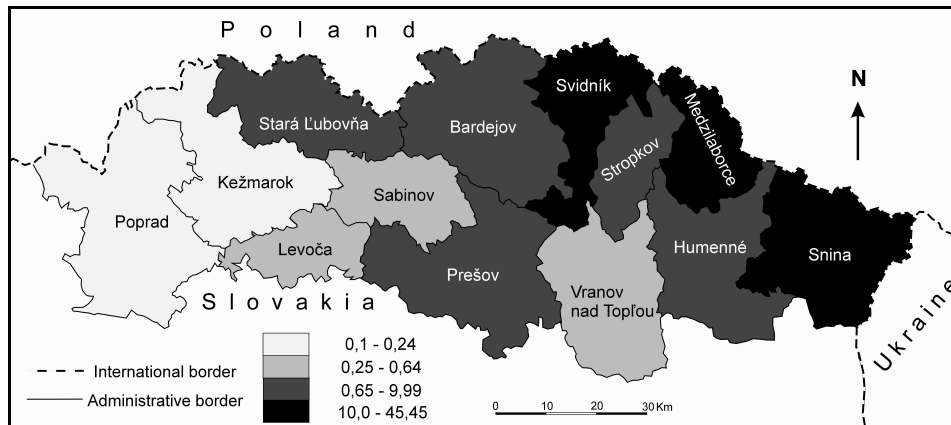


Fig. 2. The percentage of Ruthenian and Ukrainian nationality among the people of the Prešov Region, according to the results of the Slovakian national census in 2001

Source: authors' own elaboration, based on <http://portal.statistics.sk>

It is interesting to compare the number of declarations of Ruthenian and Ukrainian nationalities during the last two national censuses in Slovakia. In 1991, directly after the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia, during the first national census since many years where Ruthenian nationality could legally be declared, in the Prešov Region it was declared by 15,575 people, while Ukrainian nationality – 10,447 people. Ten years later, in 2001, the Ruthenian nationality declarations increased by 35% (5575 people). At the same time, Ukrainian nationality was declared by 3666⁷ less people than 10 years before. It shows the specific renaissance of the Ruthenian national attitudes in Slovakia and the inability of the communist authorities, which since the 1950s until the early 1990s, tried force Ukrainian nationality upon the Slovakian Ruthenians. It can be assumed, that in the next national census in Slovakia, in 2011, the “return to the roots”, from Ukrainian to Ruthenian nationality will be still progressing.

During the Slovakian national census, the question about declared religion was also asked. In 2001, in the Prešov Region, the Greek Catholic religion was declared by 121,188 people, while Orthodox Christian – by 31,458 people⁸. It can be assumed, that most of these people are of Ruthenian or Ukrainian origin. The comparison of data, related to religion and nationality declarations, indicates that the total number of Eastern Christians in the Prešov Region (152,646) is more than five times higher than the total amount

⁷ Based on <http://portal.statistics.sk>

⁸ Based on <http://portal.statistics.sk>

of people, declaring Ruthenian or Ukrainian nationality (27,991). It shows the scale of assimilation and Slovakisation of the Ruthenians during the last decades. The religious identity of traditional, usually rural communities undergoes assimilation in the slowest way. The assimilation processes in terms of national identity or language are progressing more rapidly.

In Poland, the first national census since decades, which allowed the question about national identity (there was no question about the confessed religion), was conducted in 2002. Since the end of World War II, due to political reasons, such question was never asked before.

During this census, the Lemko nationality was declared by only 5850 Polish citizens⁹, which is ten times less than previous estimations had indicated and five times less than the total number of Lemko people displaced in 1947 from Lemko Region into western and northern Poland. Such a rapid drop in the number of Lemko people in Poland and such a huge disproportion between the estimations and census results were caused by multiple factors, such as: assimilation processes, displacement from the “ethnic motherland”, strong territorial dispersion, migrations to urban areas, negative historic background or simply the overestimation and the census methodology. Surely, the results do not fully reflect the actual number of people “of Lemko origin”. The national census also showed that the distribution of the Lemkos, shaped during “Operation Wisła”, did not change in any dramatic way during the last five decades. Over 70% of people, who declared Lemko nationality, currently live in western Poland, mainly in the Lower Silesian and Lubuskie provinces¹⁰.

In Lemko Region, during the 2002 census, the Lemko nationality was declared by only 1642 people. Moreover, 789 people in the region declared themselves as Ukrainians¹¹ (Fig. 3). It can be assumed, that just like in Slovakia, the majority of them were Lemkos, who nowadays identify themselves with Ukrainian people rather than Lemko people, although ethnically they are “of Lemko origin”. It gives a total of 2431 people, which is only 4% of the inhabitants of the Lemko Region. Nowadays, both

⁹ Based on <http://www.stat.gov.pl>

¹⁰ The more detailed description of the census results, in relation to Lemko people, can be found in M. Barwiński (2009, p. 15–28).

¹¹ The declarations of the Lemkos and the Ukrainians, living in the communes located within the borders of the historical Lemko Region were summed-up. These communes included: Krynica-Zdrój, Muszyna, Uście Gorlickie, Sękowa, Ropa, Lipinki, Osiek Jasielski, Krempna, Dukla, Komańcza and the nearby town and commune of Gorlice.

ethnically and religiously, the Polish, Roman Catholic population dominates in this region, as opposed to the interwar period.

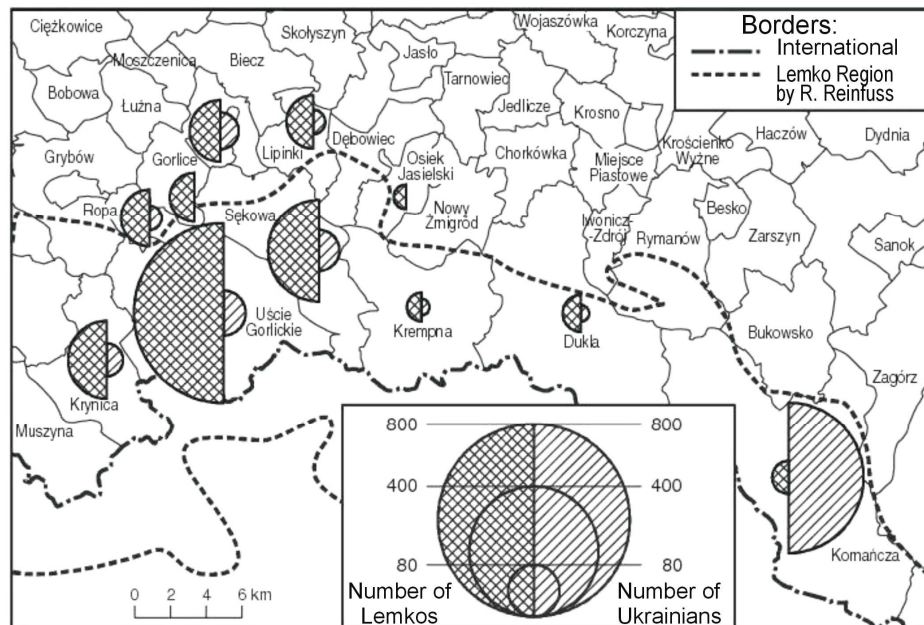


Fig. 3. Current distribution of the Lemkos and the Ukrainians in the Lemko Region (according to the communes), based on the 2002 national census
Source: authors' own elaboration, based on <http://www.stat.gov.pl>

Nowadays, the concentration of the Lemko people in the western part of Lemko Region is clearly visible, especially in the Gorlice District, where 1354 inhabitants declared Lemko nationality. This means that the district is home to as much as 82.5% of all the Lemkos in Lemko Region¹² (Fig. 3). The Uście Gorlickie Commune, located within its borders, is the largest cluster of the Lemkos, both in the Carpathian Mountains and in Poland in general (725 people). At the same time, it is the only commune in Poland, where the Lemkos constitute over 10% of the total population (11.6%).

On the other hand, in the eastern Lemko Region, in the Komańcza Commune, the Ukrainians are particularly active (521 people, 66% of all Ukrainians in Lemko Region, over 10% of the commune's population), with a minimal number of people, declaring Lemko nationality (only 35 people).

¹² It is noteworthy that the area of today's Gorlice District in its northern part is stretching beyond the historical borders of Lemko Region.

In this case, the census results clearly confirmed the results of the social-geographical studies, both from the mid-1990s and the early 21st century, which indicated the relation between the Lemkos' inhabitancy in the Carpathian Mountains and their national identity declarations. In western Lemko Region, the Lemko nationality declarations clearly predominated, while in the eastern part, it was the Ukrainian national identity that formed a majority (Barwiński, 1999, Mazurek, 2005). It is a consequence of the century-old, political-ideological divisions among the Lemko people and the related conflicts between the Old Ruthenian and Ukrainian fractions as well as the strong pro-Ukrainian sympathies in the eastern Lemko Region.

In 2011, both in Poland and Slovakia, new national censuses will be conducted. Their results will bring data on the current nationality structure of the people in the Carpathian Mountains. They will surely differ from the ones from ten years ago, mainly due to the progressing processes of assimilation and the transition of the Ruthenian people's national identity (both in Poland and Slovakia) as well as different methodology, planned in the Polish census.

One of the most important legal aspects of the 2002 national census is the fact that its results automatically became official statistical data, which had to be taken into account by institutions and administrative units, especially in the context of the *National and ethnic minorities and regional language* legal act¹³. This legal act is one of the most important legal documents for ethnic and national minorities in Poland. It defines the term of ethnic and national minority and contains detailed list of laws and duties of the minorities in democratic Poland. It is an unquestionable success for the Lemkos, who officially became one of the four ethnic minorities in Poland, especially when the only difference between ethnic and national minority, defined in the legal act, is the existence of *home country*. It is the first, official, legal distinction of the Lemkos as a separate group by the Polish authorities and at the same time, a clear distinction from the Ukrainian people, who are mentioned by the same document as one of the nine national minorities in Poland¹⁴. Such distinction was demanded by part of the Lemko community since the mid-nineteenth century.

This legal act creates the opportunity to maintain own cultural and language identity for national and ethnic minorities and prohibits discrimi-

¹³ DzU 2005, nr 17 poz. 141 (The Official Journal of Law 2005, No. 17, item 141) .

¹⁴ In Slovakia, both the Ruthenians and the Ukrainians are considered as national minority.

nation and assimilation. It also guarantees the possibility of using the minority language, as “auxiliary language” in official administrative business¹⁵. However, this can only enter into force, when there is a minimum of 20% of the national minority, declared during the census, among the total inhabitants of a particular commune. This means that currently there is no possibility of introducing the Lemko language as “auxiliary language” in any of the Polish communes.

Moreover, the legal act requires introducing additional, “traditional” names of towns and villages in the language of minority, next to the Polish names. The bilingual names can be introduced at the proposal of the commune council in all the communes, where the minority constitutes a minimum of 20% of all inhabitants and, after prior “consultations” with all members of local community, in any municipality inhabited even by a trace amount of national minority representatives. The consultations are most frequently conducted via voting (referendum), with no minimum attendance, among the local community.

The bilingual geographical names have been the topic of heated discussions in Poland since the early 1990s, long since their official introduction. It concerns mainly Polish-German names in the Opole Region and, since recently, Polish-Lemko names, especially in case of the village of Bielanka, which is the first Polish geographical name, written with Cyrillic alphabet. From the national minorities’ point of view, the bilingual names are an important way of expressing their distinctness and maintaining their own identity and a testimony to the multinational history of a particular region, which is especially vital in Lemko Region.

It was the Lemko Youth Association “Czucha”, that proposed the bilingual geographical names in Lemko Region, in July 2007. It called for the second, Lemko name to fourteen municipalities (Łosie, Bielanka, Bartne, Bodaki, Wołowiec, Blechnarka, Hańczowa, Gładyszów, Konieczna, Kunikowa, Nowica, Regietów, Ropki, Zdynia). The first municipality, where despite protests, conflicts and a clear division among the inhabitants, the Lemko name was added, was Bielanka (Gorlice Commune) in 2008. Some of the Lemko inhabitants of Bielanka treat the bilingual name as a symbolic compensation for the wrongs experienced by the Lemkos during “Operation Wisła” (Stachowiak, 2010).

In August 2008 and in May 2010, several other Lemko municipalities

¹⁵ DzU 2005, nr 17 poz. 141, rozdział 2 (The Official Journal of Law 2005, No. 17, item 141, chapter 2).

conducted the consultations and voting about the bilingual, Polish-Lemko names. One common feature in all cases was a low level of interest among the local community and low attendance rate during the voting. Only in case of Hańczowa and Małastów, the majority of local inhabitants voted against the introduction of a second name. On the other hand, in eight municipalities (Konieczna, Zdynia, Kunkowa, Nowica, Ropki, Regietów, Blechnarka, Gładyszów), the majority of voters opted for the bilingual name of their village (Stachowiak, 2010). Until December 2010, the names were not yet enlisted by the Minister of Interior and Administration to the *Registry of communes, with geographic names described in minority language*¹⁶, however it is expected to happen soon.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The Ruthenian people in the Northern Carpathians, both the Lemkos living in Poland and the Rusnaks living in Slovakia, are ethnically one group, clearly separate from the Poles and the Slovaks. Despite common roots, the both names “Lemko” and “Rusnak” are regional in their nature and are used only in their specific area. Each name is used only on one side of the Carpathian Mountains. Many centuries of Ruthenian presence in the Carpathians led to a birth of a specific region, in terms of ethnicity, culture, religion and economy – the Lemko Region. In the northern Carpathians it had a clearly defined ethnic border, while in the south both groups – the Ruthenians and the Slovaks – were mixed.

The region’s division between different state entities resulted in its ethnic, social and economic diversity. The key period of the Carpathian Ruthenians’ breaking began with the end of World War I and lasted until the late 1980s. The post-World War II events, especially displacements and the policy of Slovakian and Polish communist authorities, managed to divide the fates of the Lemkos and the Rusnaks.

After the fall of communism, the problem of Ruthenian assimilation did not disappear. The difference is that nowadays it is not a government-enforced process, but rather an automatic process, resulting from economic and social changes, the inflow of Polish and Slovakian people into the Carpathians or language assimilation, especially among children and youth. On the other hand, from the legal and administrative point of view, there

¹⁶ Ministry of Interior and Administration www.mswia.gov.pl/portal/pl/178/2958.

has been a significant improvement. Nowadays, Lemkos and Ruthenians are protected by law, which prohibits their discrimination and grants them the status of national minority (in Slovakia) or ethnic minority (in Poland).

Among the Ruthenians, both Polish and Slovakian ones, another depopulating factor lies in the existence of different factions of the national identity. Some Ruthenians have undergone Polonisation and Slovakisation, some consider themselves Ukrainians or as “ethnic group connected with the Ukrainian nation” and only a small fraction declares themselves as Lemkos or Ruthenians. These nationality divisions started in the late 19th century and intensified during the interwar period and after World War II.

Nowadays, Lemko people together with the Ukrainians constitute only 4% of the inhabitants of the Lemko Region in the Polish Carpathians (Fig. 3). Generally, the region is inhabited by over 60 thousand people. Although this figure is twice as high as in the early 1950s, it is still 45% lower than during the interwar period. It still remains a region with one of the lowest population densities in Poland, with an average population density of 28 people/km² (Soja, 2001). Despite the visible presence of Lemkos and Ukrainians, the operating Greek Catholic and Orthodox churches, Lemko and Ukrainian language courses in schools, active Lemko organisations, regular festivals and cultural events and bilingual geographical names, the Carpathians nowadays are a completely different land in terms of nationality, religion, culture and economy. The old-time Lemko Region in the Polish Carpathians does not exist anymore. It has been irreversibly destroyed by post-war displacements and the actions of communist authorities.

There are currently over 20 thousand Ruthenians living in the Slovakian part of the Carpathians, which is significantly more than in the Polish Lemko Region. They constitute a few percent of the borderland districts' population, and in three cases even several dozen percent (Fig. 2). However, the peculiarity of the Prešov Region, due to few generations-long national assimilation processes, is nowadays reflected most visibly in the religious distinction of the Eastern Christians rather than their ethnic distinction.

The elimination of all administrative barriers on the Polish-Slovakian border after the accession of both countries to the EU and the Schengen Zone did not influence the activeness of the Ruthenians on both sides of the Carpathians, in any special way. It did not result in intensified Lemko-Rusnak contacts nor did it spur the creation of any new trans-border Ruthenian cooperation forms.

The results of studies, conducted in 2005 among the Lemkos and Rusnaks, showed the existence of their self-awareness and sense of

belonging to the same community, despite their division by the state border in the Carpathians. As many as 83% of the respondents in the Prešov Region and 79% in Lemko Region believe, that Polish and Slovakian Ruthenians form one “social group”. The most frequently mentioned distinguishing features include: religion, language, ethnic origin, family ties and residence in the Carpathians (Mazurek, 2005). Nevertheless, the idea of Lemkos’ and Rusnaks’ belonging to a wider Ruthenian community, despite being present in the consciousness of the majority of their population, is not reflected in real life and remains a kind of myth among the Carpathian Ruthenians.

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