

The Rusyns in Romania

A Minority Hidden in a Minority

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“In plain language, they have gone astray and are in deep error regarding their ethnic affiliation.”

WHEN TIMOTHY Garton Ash published his article “Hail Ruthenia!”¹ in 1999, a spotlight was directed at a Slavic minority, widely unknown, the Ruthenians or Rusyns. But the attention span was short, though it remains a fact that the Rusyns are no small, negligible minority, but have a considerable size which should deserve more than temporary interest. If one considers only the national Rusyn groups, one might be entitled—as some think they are—to discard them as unimportant, or consider their cause to be exaggerated by foreign activists, mainly from the United States and Canada—as others do, especially in the Ukraine. The Ukrainian crisis after the Maidan revolution in late 2014, the Russian annexation of Crimea and the civil war in Eastern Ukraine would have offered another opportunity to delve into the complex matter of minorities in Ukraine. But the moment passed. The Rusyn minority in Western Ukraine had sent Kiev an ultimatum in 2008 to recognize them as an official minority, which Kiev declined, and the Russian president readily identified this as a chance to create confusion or, if you will, expose the double standard Ukrainian policy: the new (revolution-

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ary) Ukrainian government would accuse Russia of an inimical policy towards Ukraine, while doing the same in Ukraine towards smaller Slavic ethnic groups. If the turmoil in Ukraine, the interethnic strife which surfaced during the crisis did not suffice to draw more attention to the problems of a quite large minority like the Ukrainian Rusyns, what could the other, considerably smaller Rusyn national groups expect? Of course, they are much better off than their Ukrainian co-nationals. Their language is mostly recognized officially, like in Serbia's northern province of Vojvodina, where Rusyn is also taught at school and studied at university level. But still they have to stand their ground against the popular thesis that Rusyn is not a developed standard language but a dialect of Ukrainian, and therefore Rusyn culture clubs or printing houses are actually Ukrainian ones. This perspective dates back to communist times, when claims of a distinct linguistic identity were considered to be a separatism resurged in nationalist Ukrainian circles in the new millennium. The Vojvodina Rusyns in the days of the Yugoslavian civil wars were confronted with accusations of treason and had a hard time. But they could save what had been achieved before, with respect to the evolution and codification of their regional version of Rusyn, also thanks to quite liberal minority laws. They have political representation, just like the Rusyns in neighbouring Romania. But while the Serbian Rusyns could struggle free from the opinion that Ukrainian should be their mother tongue, the Romanian Rusyns (in Romanian *Ruteni*) are still mostly hidden in the larger Ukrainian minority. A large part of them does not even know that they are actually Rusyn, if one considers the language they are speaking. This is the point where the debate takes off. Is the vernacular that some, many, or possibly most of the Ukrainian population in Romania are speaking closer to or largely identical with standard Ukrainian or Ukrainian dialects, or is it more related to the Rusyn spoken in Vojvodina or Western Ukraine?

The Romanian Rusyns: Political and Cultural Status

THE ROMANIAN census of 2002 counted 61,091 people of the Ukrainian ethnicity, and some of them may be Rusyns, though they did not declare themselves as such. The members of this group live primarily in northwestern Romania, part of Transylvania, with the largest populations found in the Satu Mare and Maramureş counties.² As an officially-recognized ethnic minority, Rusyns have one seat reserved in the Romanian Chamber of Deputies, currently held by the Cultural Union of the Ruthenians of Romania. In the last 80 years the number of Ukrainians and Rusyns has dramatically fallen. In 1930 they still numbered 512,115, or 3.2 percent of the population.³ In 2011 there

were just 50,920 Ukrainians and Rusyns (0.2 percent).⁴ As the precise number of Rusyns among the Ukrainian population in Romania is still not known—a hidden minority within a minority—in 2002 Gheorghe Firczak, a Romanian-Rusyn activist, published a short booklet about the Rusyns with the suggestive title *Un popor pe nedrept uitat* (A people unjustly forgotten). The Cultural Union of the Ruthenians of Romania wants to overcome this deplorable status of a forgotten people and come out of hiding. It is trying to awaken a Rusyn linguistic and cultural self-consciousness among those who feel more inclined towards an identity distinct from Ukrainian. The Union was founded in 2000, and since its humble beginnings it has, as it declared officially, always supported democratic values and a durable evolution of the Romanian society. The Cultural Union wants to disseminate, popularize and deepen the knowledge of the history, the traditions and cultural values of the Rusyns, within a good-neighbourly, tolerant and respectful relationship with the other ethnicities in Romania. In the solemn words of its agenda:

One of the aims of the Union is the commitment to human rights as defined in the Romanian Constitution, for instance the freedom of expression, economic activity, prosperity and social progress, the freedom to organize cultural manifestations, on one's own behalf and together with other organizations of the national minorities and the civil society, thereby promoting the interests of the Union at home as well as abroad. From the start the Cultural Union of the Ruthenians of Romania has fought for a revitalisation of the national feeling among the Ruthenians living within the borders of Romania. From the very beginning its actions were not only aimed at a cultural renaissance of the Ruthenians, but the Union was also trying to recreate a spiritual union of the Ruthenian ethnicity and a revival of Ruthenianism among those who, forced by circumstances, abandoned their ethnic and cultural heritage or their Ruthenian spirit in the dark communist epoch. The actions of the CURR are inspired by the deeds of our illustrious forebears, in order to make a contribution to the affirmation, conservation and development of the Ruthenian spirit.

The Rusyn World Congress in Sighetu Marmăției

THE ROMANIAN Rusyns' self respect was strengthened when in June 2007 the Rusyn World Congress took place in the Romanian city of Sighetu Marmăției. The World Congress had been created as a means to unite Rusyns scattered all over the countries sharing the Carpathian homeland. For the Romanian Rusyns, still having a lot to recover in terms of cultural and

national pride, the fact that the Ninth Rusyn World Congress was held in Romania at the end of June 2007 was more than a pleasant surprise. At the same time, the Greek-Catholic Church, an issue which had created a lot of turmoil in Romania since the system change after the revolution of 1989, was put into the spotlight. The Greek-Catholics had demanded a return of ecclesiastical property seized by the communist state to the great advantage of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Given the general accusations aimed at the Uniates, deemed to be only a means to disunite the Eastern Orthodox Churches, the request of the delegates of the World Congress for recognition of the Rusyn Greek-Catholic Church was promptly perceived as a new attempt of the Rusyns to destroy the national unity, this time of Romania. The delegates, among them the doyen of Rusyn studies, Paul Robert Magocsi, issued a “Request of the delegates and guests of the 9th World Congress of Rusyns” for recognition of the Rusyn Greek-Catholic Church *sui iuris* and the appointment of a Rusyn bishop to Pope Benedict XVI.⁵ Rome did not react, as the German Pope was busy working on improving the relationship with Eastern Orthodoxy, especially with regard to liturgical and sociopolitical matters. Romania was honoured by the presence of the World Congress because it (probably) has the smallest Rusyn national group and also because it was the one Rusyn-inhabited country in the Carpathian realm where immediately after 1989 no new Rusyn organization was established.⁶ The later the foundation, the more eager were the Romanian Rusyn activists to support the Rusyn movement’s determination to demonstrate a unified and unique identity for the Rusyn people. They focused on strengthening the features that make them distinct from other related peoples. The firm will to establish Rusyns alongside the larger historical European nations and ethnicities, to prove their long-standing historical existence, is something the Romanian Rusyns share with the Romanians. The idea of a homogenous past and of clear origins is something the Romanian historian Lucian Boia tried to deconstruct as national myths of the Romanian nation.⁷ The Romanian Rusyn Gheorghe Firczak, president of the Cultural Union, in his short outline of the Rusyns’ history states that the origins of the Rusyns are not clear, but only a few lines later he speaks of the theory that Rusyns originated from a Celtic population which was later Slavified as if it were to be taken for granted. Not only did Caesar mention the Ruthenians in his *Commentarii de bello Gallico*, but also the Renaissance scholar and cleric Enea Silvio Piccolomini stated in his work about Transylvania that the north was populated by *Ruteni*. Pliny allegedly counted them among the ancient tribe of the *Aquitani*. The standard theory is that Rusyns were among the many different Slavic tribes which evolved out of the Kievan Rus’. The consequence of Firczak’s argument, meant to prove the ancient origins and autonomy of the

Rusyns, is that he denies that the names Rutheni or Ruthenians were given to Ukrainians living in the eastern parts of former Austria-Hungary.⁸ It might be more appropriate to assume that not all Ruthenians living in the eastern parts of Austria-Hungary were Ukrainians or Rusyns, but a smaller or larger part of them were in fact Rusyns. That Rusyn activists so forcefully stress their autonomy has a lot to do with the fact that the Ukrainian state has assumed the right to speak for all ‘Ukrainians’ beyond its borders, at least until today—thereby negating the right of self-determination of Rusyns and others—and is doing so again since its national status and unity came under renewed pressure from the Russian side. Rusyn claims of autonomy, whether in Romania or Hungary, are feared to cause an undesired split among the Ukrainian nation abroad and in Ukraine, especially in Western Ukraine, where the Rusyn movement is decidedly far stronger than in Romania, Hungary or Slovakia.

Rusyn Identity-Building in Romania

WHEN FIRCAK was asked by Ioan Romeo Roşianu,⁹ in an interview for a popular Romanian online magazine, what the differences were between Rusyns and Ukrainians, he answered that they were the same as between Romanians and French or between Czechs and Slovaks, while the differences between Slavic peoples might be a bit smaller than in the Romance case: “Ruthenians are a people different from Ukrainians.” They are recognized as a distinct ethnicity in the Czech Republic, in Hungary, Serbia, Montenegro, Romania and in the United States, only in Ukraine the recognition is denied, not only to Rusyns but to a great many other national minorities, too. If Ukraine seeks democratization, as declared on the so-called ‘European Maidan’—a declaration which sounds hollow if one only considers the treatment of the minorities—and is trying to join the European Union, it should recognize the ethnic minorities, as the ethnic-cultural diversity is one of the pillars of the European Union, Firczak stressed. But at the same time he was adamant that the Ukrainian position did not really matter to him. It would be Ukraine’s or Romania’s right to state that Rusyns do not exist, but they do exist all over world, also in Romania. Who are in fact the Rusyns, the interviewing Roşianu asked, and Firczak gave a rather generalizing, superficial answer which quite obviously did not satisfy the interviewer: “Ruthenians are a Slavic population from Central Europe, a Christian population. The Ruthenian traditions do not differ completely from the traditions of the other Slavic peoples. They have a distinct folklore of their own, folk music, Christian customs. A special holiday is the one in May, when they celebrate the Day of Ruthenians, the moment when

Ruthenians declared their independence before the Viennese court, in 1848. . . . Ruthenians are more present in the northern part of Romania than in the western one.¹⁰ That their number, according to the latest official Romanian statistics, amounts to only 257 persons has a lot to do with a problem Rusyn national groups were and are still confronted with, with the only exception of the former Yugoslavia, or indeed Serbia and neighbouring Croatia. The problem was that a Rusyn option either did not come up in the lists, because they were considered to be Ukrainian, or the option had no chance to become more widely known.¹¹ After 1918, the Rusyns on Romanian territory were considered a distinct ethnicity in some statistics, while in others they were not mentioned. As a consequence of the treaties signed after the end World War One, a part of Maramureş was integrated into Czechoslovakia, including places like Rahiv, Iasinov, Hust, Irsava etc. The southern part was assigned to Romania, including Sighetu Marmăției and Vişeu, and some villages inhabited by Rusyns. Rusyns elected their Rusyn representatives in the elections in the autumn of 1919. Orestie Ilniczki, representing the Rusyns in Maramureş, declared his loyalty to the new Romanian state in a speech made before the House of Deputies. The entire Romanian legislation, including the 1923 Constitution, clearly abided by an ethnic non-discrimination principle. After 1945, under the communist dictatorship, Rusyns were not mentioned at all or mentioned together with the Ukrainians, which necessarily caused denationalization, a loss of ethnic and cultural identity. Many Rusyns no longer had a notion that they might be something other than Ukrainian, a phenomenon one could also observe in Slovakia, Poland, Hungary, or even partly in the former Yugoslavia, namely, in the Serbian autonomous province of Vojvodina. But there it was a personal decision whether someone considered himself to be a Ukrainophile or Rusynophile, tending more towards the theory of Ukrainian or autochthonous Rusyn-Yugoslavian origins. Cultural organizations existed for both orientations. To reawaken an ethnic and cultural consciousness is a laborious task. The Rusyn minority in Romania, just like other national minorities, has a guaranteed number of seats in Parliament. But the number of votes the minorities' representatives receive is never identical with the official statistical number of declared members of a certain minority. Some members decide to vote for deputies from another national group or from the majority population. And every minority organization in Romania has always received votes also from the ethnic Romanians. In recent years the pressure on the Romanian Rusyns to hide did not come from the Romanian government, which guaranteed them seats in the assembly, but from the mass media and the Ukrainian groups which reject a Rusyn national orientation.

Besides being head of the Cultural Union of Rusyns in Romania, Firczak is also president of the World Council of Rusyns which meets every three months

in order to maintain political and cultural contacts between the national Rusyn groups. It edits Rusyn language newsletters and magazines, organizes exchange visits between Rusyns from different countries or presentations of Rusyn folklore groups. The Romanian Rusyns' primary aim is to recreate or create a national consciousness, which is not easy to do after decades of marginalization. In this regard meetings, talks on cultural issues and, last but not least, international cooperation are of vital importance. The thesis propounded by the Romanian Rusyn Firczak and by other Rusyn activists in Western Ukraine, whereby the Rusyns are an ethnic group distinct from the Ukrainians, with their own culture and language, is challenged not only in Ukraine, where the Rusyns are regularly accused of being traitors and separatists. On the website of the Greater Romania Party, the Rusyns (Ruthenians) are listed after the small national minorities (Ukrainians, Germans, Lipovans, Serbs and others) among the "very small national minorities" (Bulgarians, Croats, Greeks, Jews, Italians, Ruthenians).¹² Only the Slovenes and the Gagauz are fewer in number than the Romanian Rusyns. Ivan Marocico, delegate of the Ukrainians in Romania, wrote that the Rusyn identity is a "false decoration on the Central European political scene." Ramona Băluțescu, in her "Pledoarie pentru minoritățile fără reprezentare"¹³ (A plea in favour of the minorities without representation), wrote that "for political rather than ethnic reasons, some people from the government decided that there is both a Ruthenian minority and a Ukrainian one."

Romania's Rusyns and the Ukrainian Crisis

WESTERN UKRAINE, the province of Transcarpathia or Podkarpatska Rus/Carpathian Russia, a territory Ukrainians nowadays call Zakarpattia, is the central reference point of all Rusyns, whether in Vojvodina or in Romania. It is considered to be the cradle of Rusyn civilization. Its boundaries are delineated by the Western Slavs, the Slovaks and Poles, by Hungary and Romania in the southwest, and it stretches into the Romanian region of Maramureș, which is a part of Transylvania. The Cultural Union of the Ruthenians of Romania claims that the Rusyns were an "element of interethnic stability in the region," a claim which aroused some doubts, especially during the Ukrainian crisis from the autumn of 2014. At the end of November 2014, a fierce debate took place in the Romanian parliament about the situation in Transcarpathia.¹⁴ A resolution was read out which had been passed by the Congress of Subcarpathian Ruthenians on 28 September 2014, drawing attention to the tragic fact that innocent citizens, Rusyns, Romanians, Hungarians, Ukrainians and of other nationalities, fall victim to an escalation of violence amounting

to genocide in certain regions. The Romanian Parliament and the Romanian authorities were called upon to take the necessary steps in order to safeguard the security and the interests of Romanians and Rusyns (Ruthenians) living in Transcarpathia. The demand was legitimized by the 1991 referendum, when approximately 80 percent of the region's population expressed a desire for autonomy.¹⁵ Under these circumstances, the region is obliged to defend the identity and the respect for the tradition, culture, education and the maternal language of every single ethnic group. The resolution emphasized that the democratic will of a people has to be respected, and that corruption was a cancer, a monster able to destroy a nation—and the best and most visible example was the Ukraine.

The leader of the Democratic Union of Albanians in Romania, Claudiu Filip, who supported the Rusyn cause, said: "If Ukrainian politicians know how to handle the situation, Ukrainian citizens could live together in peace and harmony for a thousand years in the same geographical area without the loss of human life."¹⁶ Cooperation between the ethnic groups, and not a new one-sided Ukrainian nationalism should be the guiding principle. Mihai Lauruc, the then leader of the Subcarpathian Rusyns in Romania, delivered a passionate plea for peace and understanding to world leaders and especially to the Romanian and Ukrainian authorities on behalf of his brethren in Ukraine and of the other ethnic minorities: "A people must be able to decide alone on its destiny, in a peaceful and democratic way, as the people's will was already clearly expressed in the referendum . . . In this special moment of the campaign, Rusyns need no longer feel that they are orphans."¹⁷ Romanian diplomacy has to see that this move is not perceived as an interference in domestic Ukrainian policy, as throughout history the Subcarpathian Rusyns have never instigated a conflict, living peacefully alongside Romanians or Ukrainians. In the historical Maramureş region, where most of the Romanian Rusyns live, long standing conflicts never existed. And Lauruc added that in the extremely complex current context Russia could not be ignored, not only because it is the heartland of the large family of Slavic peoples. Lauruc's plea was a delicate matter, because Rusyn officials in Transcarpathia had sent an appeal to the Russian president demanding support for their aspirations of independence from Ukraine and protection from "enslavement by the aggressive Galician fascism," which was oppressing the Rusyns and sought to weaken them by dispatching more ethnic Ukrainians to the area.¹⁸ These claims and the association with Russia are considered radical by most of the Rusyn organizations in other countries, Wiktorek states.¹⁹ Russian attention has drawn the Rusyns into a contentious debate between Russia and Ukraine over their political relationship, the validity of Ukrainian national identity, and the question of which country should be considered the rightful heir of Kievan Rus' and therefore claim political control over the East Slavic lands. Russian media

coverage and the forceful use of the internet by Rusyns and nationalist Russians focused on the issue of Rusyn discontent in Transcarpathia, which “threatens to overshadow the progress that Rusyns have made toward their cultural revival and self-determination by bringing them further into the Russian-Ukrainian conflict.”²⁰ On the other hand, in January 2015 several Transcarpathian Rusyn activists issued a statement expressing their support for Ukraine’s path to democratisation and European integration. Their most far-reaching request was to reinstate the Rusyns as an official ethnic group in Ukraine.²¹

That some of the Transcarpathian or Romanian Rusyns opted for Russia in the Ukrainian conflict has a lot to do with the idea that both nations share a common cultural, ethnic and historical tradition. But the main reason seems to be the discontent, the disregard they experience especially in Western Ukraine regarding their ethnic and cultural identity. In Romania this is not officially denied but—and this is the analogy with the Ukrainian counterpart—the Ukrainian national narrative is still so overwhelming, in the political sense, that the Rusyn cause still has a long way to go, no matter how large the national group is. Quite ironically, even the linguistic argument has a basis in the case of Romania. Professor Paul Romaniuc, a Romanian Rusyn expert in the history and culture of the Subcarpathian Rusyns, argued during the aforementioned debate in the Romanian Parliament that all those on Romanian territory who claim to be of Ukrainian nationality were in fact speaking Rusyn (Ruthenian) and simply did not know literary Ukrainian: “After 1991, after they were integrated into the Ukrainian state, an aggressive Ukrainization of the Ruthenians started which tried to inculcate an ethnic affiliation to an invented state, and this way you can explain why the Ruthenians no longer know what to believe about their affiliation—are they Russians, Ruthenians, Ukrainians? . . . In plain language, they have gone astray and are in deep error regarding their ethnic affiliation.”

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Notes

1. Timothy Garton Ash, “Hail Ruthenia!” *The New York Review of Books* 46, 7 (22 April 1999): 54–55.
2. In the Middle Ages many villages in Maramureş had both Romanian and Rusyn names, such as: Bărănică–Bronyka; Coşna, Cuşniţa; Lipceni–Lepcsa; Mestecăniş–Bereznic; Poiana Teiului–Lepcsa Polyana; Poiana Vulpii–Lişiţa; Dănilleşti–Danilovo; Hust–Hust; Năneni–Nankova; Boureni–Volovoie; Făget–Bukovecz; Leşeni–Lyahovecz; Prepeleliţa–Pilipecz; Repedea–Repenei; Satul Nou–Novoszelita; Satul Vechiu–Staraszelita; Ariniş–Jalova; Neaga–Negova; Teceu–Tiacevo. Sighet had been named Sihot prior to becoming a vojvodal residence; Hungarians called it

Sziget due to its island appearance. Many medieval documents mentioned it as Marmația.

3. *Recensământul general al populației din 1930*, Populația pe neamuri, Tabela 1 – Total România.
4. *Rezultatele finale ale Recensământului din 2011*, Tab. 8. Populația stabilă după etnie – județe, municipii, orașe, comune; recensamantromania.ro.
5. The Request read as follows: “Your Holiness, We, the undersigned members of the World Council of Rusyns, being representatives of Rusyn cultural organizations in ten countries around the world associated in the World Congress of Rusyns, met on 22–23 June 2007 at the 9th Congress in the town of Sighetu Marmației in Romania. First of all, we would like to greet You, Your Holiness, and send You some heart-felt prayers from Rusyn Greek-Catholics, by which, to almighty God, we pray for You, representative of Jesus Christ on Earth, health and God’s grace in abundance. At the World Congress meeting, problems of Rusyns around the world were discussed, especially their cultural-national development and recognition of their nationality rights in each country, where they live in high numbers. Among the discussed matters was the situation of Rusyn Greek-Catholics in Slovakia, who encounter injustice in non-recognition of their rights to use their mother tongue, Rusyn, in liturgical ceremonies, the right to post Rusyn priests in parishes with Rusyn congregations and the right to educate Rusyn theologians to preach among Rusyn believers in the Rusyn language. Rusyn priests addressed Your predecessor Holy Father John Paul II in 1997 and later in 2003 with an official request for recognition of the Rusyn Greek-Catholic Church sui iuris in Slovakia, as well as with a request to appoint a Rusyn bishop for this Church. However, the submitted matter has remained unresolved to this day. Rusyns realize the difficulties in resolving their request, but they find it just and fair according to secular and church laws. That is why we address You, Holy Father, with trust and hope and we believe that our pleas will be heard. Our hope at this time is strengthened by Your increased interest in events within the Catholic Church in Slovakia, about which You were informed at the recent visit of bishops from Slovakia to the Vatican, as well as about the effort to create new bishoprics here. Although in the 1968 *Annuario Pontificio*, the Rusyn Greek-Catholic Church sui iuris was changed to Slovak, the original Rusyn Church sui iuris did not cease to exist. On the contrary, this Church wishes to keep its identity and develop the religious and cultural heritage of its ancestors. It is also proven by the fact that, at the latest census of residents in Slovakia in 2001, 35 thousand Greek-Catholics designated Rusyn as their mother tongue. Your Holiness, on behalf of Rusyn Greek-Catholics, loyal messengers of Cyril and Methodius and of the most holy tradition of the Eastern Slavonic Church ceremonies, which link Greek-Catholic Rusyns not only in Slovakia, but also in Ukraine, Poland, Serbia, Croatia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, the USA, Canada, and elsewhere in the world, delegates of which represented their brothers and sisters also at the 9th World Congress of Rusyns in Romania, we ask You, who are in the position of the Holiest Office of Roman Pontifex Maximus, to hear the voice of Greek-Catholic Rusyns in Slovakia and renew the Rusyn Greek-Catholic Church in Slovakia. For this deed, You will be sincerely

thanked and Your decision will be beatified not only by the contemporary Rusyn Greek-Catholic congregation, but also their successors.”

6. Before the end of the 1990s a total of five new Rusyn organizations had come into existence where Rusyns live. Apart from the Society of Carpatho-Rusyns in Ukrainian Transcarpathia were the Rusyn Renaissance Society (Rusynska Obroda) in Medzilaborce, Czechoslovakia (est. March 1990); the Lemko Association (Stovaryšynja Lemkiv) in Legnica, Poland (est. April 1990); the Society of Friends of Subcarpathian Rus' (Společnost přátel Podkarpatské Rusi) in Prague (est. October 1990); and the Ruska Matka (Rusyn Matka) in Ruski Kerestur, Yugoslavia (est. December 1990). By the spring of 1991, a sixth one was established in Hungary, the Rusyn Organization in Hungary (Magyaroszági Ruszinok Szervezete) in Budapest (est. May 1991). Most of these organizations have their own Rusyn-language newspapers, journals, or access to existing publications. All five organizations have put forth basically the same demands: that Rusyns be recognized as a distinct nationality, that a Rusyn literary language be codified and eventually be used in schools as medium of instruction, and that Rusyns be guaranteed all rights as a national minority in the countries where they live and, in the case of Transcarpathia, that Rusyns be recognized as the dominant indigenous nationality. (Cf. Magocsi 1995.)
7. Cf. L. Boia, *Istorie și mit în conștiința românească* (Bucharest, 1997); id., *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest, 2001); id., *Geschichte und Mythos: Über die Gegenwart des Vergangenen in der rumänischen Gesellschaft* (Cologne–Weimar–Vienna, 2003).
8. Gh. Firczak, *Rutenii/Rusinii un popor pe nedrept uitat: Compendiu istorico-geografic* (n.p., 2002), 7–8.
9. DV, “Rutenii,” posted in *Rutenii*, 9 April 2015 (<http://necenzuratmm.ro/rutenii/43217-rutenii.html>).
10. Ibid.
11. The same is true in Western Ukraine. If we compare the situation of Rusyns in Ukraine with their co-nationals in Slovakia, we see that the former face serious difficulties owing to the Ukrainian government’s refusal to list Rusyn as an ethnic identity. Zakarpattia Oblast, the most western region of Ukraine, was established on 22 January 1946 as a part of Ukrainian Soviet Socialistic Republic, but before it had been Czechoslovakian territory which was ceded due to a treaty between Czechoslovakia and the USSR. In 1946, the Rusyns in Zakarpattia Oblast numbered 800 thousand and in 2001, according to the Ukrainian Census, only 183 people identified themselves as Rusyns. The main reason why this mysterious disappearance of Rusyns happened in the historical region of Carpathian Ruthenia is simple. The Ukrainian government continued the Soviet tradition that did not recognize the Rusyns living in that country as a distinct nationality, but rather as an ethnic sub-group of Ukrainians. This is why many Carpatho-Rusyns were included in the Ukrainian nation that made the majority of 80.5% in Zakarpattia Oblast. Only in 2007 the Zakarpattia Regional Council officially recognized Rusyns as a separate ethnicity in Ukraine, and then in 2012 Rusyn obtained the official regional language status in certain areas of the province (oblast) (cf. Laura Davidel, “Rediscovery of

the Rusyn Culture and Language in Slovakia,” *OneEurope*, 18 July 2014, <http://one-europe.info/rediscovery-of-the-rusyn-culture-and-language-in-slovakia>).

12. Grupuri etnice din România (<http://prm-central.ro/grupuri-etnice-din-romania/>).
13. Cf. www.timpolis.ro/print.
14. “Rutenii Subcarpatici au sensibilizat Parlamentul României!!!” (27 Nov. 2014) (http://www.comisarul.ro/diverse/rutenii-subcarpatici-au-sensibilizat-parlamentul-r_292619.html).
15. The Society of Carpatho-Rusyns in Transcarpathia had called for the renewal of the autonomous status that the Subcarpathian Rus’ had enjoyed during the inter-war years. The text of the declaration, which was sent to former USSR President Gorbachev, the USSR Supreme Soviet, the Ukrainian parliament, and the United Nations, first appeared in the organ of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society, *Otchyi khram*, September–October 1990. In order to determine the views of the local population, the society, joined by other minority organizations, called for a question on Transcarpathian autonomy to be added to the referendum on Ukrainian independence that was held on 1 December 1991. There was a large voter turnout, with 92.6% favoring Ukrainian independence and 76.8% self-rule for Transcarpathia. The issue of Transcarpathian autonomy elicited great interest in neighboring countries, although this is an internal issue for the government and state of Ukraine. The extremely high pro-independence percentage was certainly the reason why post-Soviet Ukraine, fearing nothing more than new threats to its young independence, brushed off every demand for autonomy and especially independence of even the tiniest part of the country.
16. “Rutenii Subcarpatici au sensibilizat Parlamentul României!!!”
17. *Ibid.*
18. Moscow helped the Rusyns in the past and must do so again because “a humanitarian disaster for the Rusyn people and all the residents of Transcarpathia has begun at the hands of the Galician Nazis and local collaborators,” the appeal argues (rossiyanavsegda.ru, 28 October). To support the Rusyns, the letter continues, Moscow needs to conduct “a peacekeeping operation for a short period” in Transcarpathia and “restore the pre-Soviet status of the Republic of Transcarpathian Rus’,” which was not within the borders of Ukraine. And Moscow must insist that Kyiv recognize the results of the 1991 referendum in which 76.8 percent of those taking part declared that “Transcarpathia is a special, self-administered territory and a subject of international law not included in any present territorial-administrative formation,” that is, within Ukraine. The language of this appeal suggests, some argued, that it was written not by Rusyns but rather by Russians, or at least by those under the influence of the Kremlin’s massive anti-Ukrainian propaganda effort.
19. Cf. Wiktorek 2010.
20. *Ibid.*, 91.
21. “‘Long Live Ruthenia.’ The Russian Press Cooks up Ethnic Separatism in Transcarpathia,” *The Economist*, 3 April 2015.

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Abstract

The Rusyns in Romania: A Minority Hidden in a Minority

The Carpatho-Rusyns in Romania are a minority which is officially recognized, statistically ranging among the small ethnic groups of Romania, although their actual number might be far higher. A still underdeveloped group identity, restricted knowledge of the cultural and linguistic Rusyn heritage, and the fact that most Romanian Rusyns still consider themselves to be Ukrainian put a strain on the identity-building process. The recent Ukrainian crisis, shedding new light on the denied recognition of Carpatho-Rusyns in Western Ukraine, has stepped up the identity discourse among Romanian Rusyns.

Keywords

Romania, Rusyns, Ruthenians, minorities, identity, Ukraine