



"HENRI COANDA"
AIR FORCE ACADEMY
ROMANIA



"GENERAL M.R. STEFANIK"
ARMED FORCES ACADEMY
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of SCIENTIFIC PAPER
AFASES 2012
Brasov, 24-26 May 2012

TRAGEDY OF CARPATHO-UKRAINE

Róbert HURNÝ

Armed Forces Academy of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik, Liptovský Mikuláš, Slovak Republic

Abstract: *Subcarpathian Ruthenia (Subcarpathian Rus') was an integral part of Czechoslovakia in the interwar period. On the basis of the peace treaty contracted in Saint-Germain-en-Laye (September 10, 1919) and the Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic (February 29, 1920), Subcarpathian Ruthenia should have had an autonomous position in the political-juridical system of Czechoslovakia, its autonomous council and an autonomous government corresponding to the council. The central government in Prague was hesitating to impose a real autonomy of Subcarpathian Ruthenia within the republic because it did not demonstrate satisfying political, national, confessional and economic conditions and represented a continual threat of irredentism from various Carpathoruthenian elements and revisionism emerging from the neighbouring states – mainly Hungary. The central government established it only after Munich Agreement which considerably weakened Czechoslovakia as for its power. The government made an effort to consolidate Czechoslovakia by declaring autonomy of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. This had not happened until the moment when Czechoslovakia was on its way to cease. These autonomous tendencies had its place in a complex game of the neighbouring countries (Germany, Poland, and Hungary) whose main objective was to destroy Czechoslovakia. Finally when Subcarpathian representatives' dreams about their own country were fulfilled, it came to its early end.*

Key words: *Subcarpathian Ruthenia, Carpatho-Ukraine, autonomy, democracy, state, autonomous government, national identity, constitution, political-juridical system, irredentism, territorial revisionism.*

Following The Munich Conference, which was held on 29th – 30th September 1938, the Czechoslovak government accepted ultimatum presented by four powers (Germany, Italy, France and United Kingdom) regarding the withdrawal of sizeable part of Czechoslovak territory predominantly populated by Sudeten Germans. There were several internal political changes in the Czechoslovak Republic. The President of the Republic, Edvard Benes, abdicated on 5th October 1938. In the following few days, the process of long-term effort to autonomy of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia within the Czechoslovak Republic was completed.

Finally, on 11th October 1938, the population of Subcarpathian Ruthenia witnessed the first Subcarpatho-Ruthenian autonomous government.

Brody's autonomous government had to face a lot of problems. Dealing with these problems caused resistance and polarized the situation in the government as well as in the society. Brody's manoeuvre with the manipulation of the law concerning self-determination in the form of plebiscite seemed to be a real detonator on internal political scene. On 23rd October, the autonomous government decided to carry out general plebiscite in accordance with the rights of peoples to self-determination as the only possibility of maintaining the integrity of Subcarpathian Ruthenia. The document was signed by all the members of autonomous government. The idea of plebiscite was openly supported by Russophile and pro-Ruthenian parties and associations, Jewish society, Byzantine- Catholic and Orthodox

Churches. Pro-Ukrainian parties and societies took action against it. The autonomous government defended the approach, declaring the Czechoslovak government breaches out international obligations enshrined in the Peace Treaty of Saint-Germain to protect the integrity of Subcarpathian Ruthenia by its inability and thus the autonomous government is entitled to seek their own solutions. The decision of the autonomous government about to carry out the plebiscite was in legal terms unconstitutional, moreover Subcarpathian politicians did not have a good reputation in Prague governmental circles.¹

The question of arbitration and plebiscite became the subject of negotiations of the Prague government and ministers of autonomous governments of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia on 25th October 1938. The majority of the present spoke for German – Italian arbitration. While majority of Ruthenians adopted a proposal of arbitrage, Andrej Brody found himself in isolation, because he insisted on plebiscite under international supervision and came with a request to connect region *Prjasevscina* with Subcarpathian Ruthenia in case of possible loss of Uzhhorod and other towns. On the same day Brody was accused of treason by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Justice. He was deprived of immunity and the Prime Minister Jan Syrový removed Brody from the position of President of the Autonomous Government on 26th October. The Central Government decided to appoint Peter Zidovský, Russophile and pro-Ruthenian politician, to the position.²

Czechoslovak authorities probably received information from German Intelligence Services confirming that A. Brody was an agent paid by Budapest. During the search of his flat a half of a million pengő and a letter, in which Budapest guaranteed Brody the title of Baron as soon as the Hungary establishes its authorities in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, were found. It was proved that *Autonomous Agricultural Union* led by Brody received fifty thousand crowns monthly as a financial support. It was paid out by Hungarian Consulate in Bratislava. Brody and his minister, who was found guilty of receiving high financial amounts from the Polish ambassador in Prague (from 1927 to 1935) - Waclaw Grzybowski, were arrested.³ That was the story of the first infamous

autonomous government in Subcarpathian Ruthenia.

On 26th October, Prime Minister Jan Syrový appointed a new government led by Avhustyn Voloshyn, who took the oath of fidelity to the Republic to the Prime Minister by a phone call. Instead of originally selected candidate, Peter Zidovský, the government finally agreed to appoint A. Voloshyn, who was recommended by Berlin. In his government there were also Edmund Bachyn'skyi as an interior minister and Julian Revay as a communication minister and a minister of public work, health and social care. Such composition of the government suited Nazi German policy, taking advantage from the cooperation with strong Ukrainian emigration. The overall composition of the government differed from Brody's government substantially, especially by their prevailing Ukrainian orientation. At the same time as proposed by J. Revay the central Government stopped the activities of all political parties. The only political organization which remained was *Ukrainian National Union*, a top body of all pro-Ukrainian organizations.

On 2nd November 1938, German-Italian Arbitration took place in Vienna (First Vienna Award). According to resulting protocol, sizeable part of Southern Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia had to be surrendered within the days from 5th– 10th November. Subcarpathian Ruthenia lost 1 523 km², the towns Uzhhorod, Mukachevo a Berehovo, all in all 97 villages with 173 233 inhabitants.⁴ Khust became a new seat of Voloshyn's government. Although Voloshyn was disappointed with arbitration results, he built up his essential political line on the basis of cooperation with Nazi Germany. Voloshyn's focus on Berlin also resulted from the distribution of international powers after Vienna Arbitration. Hungary and Poland were still dissatisfied with territorial changes and continuously strived to absorb Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Hungarian and Polish agitators continued in their sabotage activities.⁵

In mid November the Hungarian government led by Bela Imredy decided to take actions against Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Horthy gained understanding in person of German ambassador, but General Staff of Hungarian Army had certain concerns. The Czechoslovak Army moved troops

¹ Pop, Ivan: *Dějiny Podkarpatské Rusi v datech*. Praha: Libri, 2005, p. 365.

² *Ibidem*, p. 366.

³ Švorc, Peter: *Zakliata krajina. Podkarpatská Rus 1918-1946*. Prešov: Universum, 1996, p. 95.

⁴ Pop, Ivan: *op. cit.*, p. 370.

⁵ Suško, Ladislav: *Podkarpatská Rus ako autonómna krajina pomníchovskej – druhej ČSR*. In *Česko-slovenská historická ročenka 1997*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1997, p. 159.



"HENRI COANDA"
AIR FORCE ACADEMY
ROMANIA



"GENERAL M.R. STEFANIK"
ARMED FORCES ACADEMY
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of SCIENTIFIC PAPER
AFASES 2012
Brasov, 24-26 May 2012

from the other regions massively and they became subordinated to General Oleg Svatek. Only Tiso's Slovak autonomous government did not believe in maintaining Subcarpathian Ruthenia and proposed to replace Kosice, Nove Zamky and Roznava for Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Hungarian occupation was supposed to be conducted on the days from 20th -21st November 1938. Hungarian diplomacy managed to fool Mussolini and was promised to receive 96 jet fighters.⁶ However, this action was not coordinated with Germany cause a sharp reaction in Berlin. Nazi leadership resolutely cracked down on upcoming event. This action was unacceptable for Berlin because it would have demonstrated Hungarian independence too much. Therefore Berlin in cooperation with Rome made it impossible by sending resolute diplomatic demarches and identified forthcoming invasion of Hungarian Army in Subcarpathian Ruthenia as the violation of Vienna Arbitration. The Nazis used the argument about inability to discredit prestige of Germany and Italy as arbitrators.⁷ In Budapest it was understood that the rest of Subcarpathian territory can be obtained only at cost of further reinforcing of continuing relationships with Berlin. It was rather a great disgrace for Imredy's government and a few months later the government resigned.⁸

Nazi Germany used Subcarpathian Ruthenia as a trump card in the political game against Poland, Hungary and the Soviet Union. Expectations and hopes of Subcarpathian population were not taken seriously by Berlin. Even accounts concerning the use of Subcarpathian Ruthenia as so called "Ukrainian Piemont" in the process of creating of *Great Ukraine* were not clear, since German leadership did not have clear idea about forming Great Ukraine.⁹

On the days 19th to 22nd November 1938 both chambers of National Assembly passed constitutional laws about Slovak autonomy and autonomy of Subcarpathian Ruthenia (Law n. 328/1938 Collection of laws and regulations from 22nd November 1938). The official name of the state was changed into Czecho-Slovakia. Representatives of pro-Ukrainian political orientation strived to enforce the change of the title into a new one – *Carpatho-Ukraine*, the effort was not successful. The former titled maintained. Constitutional Law also cancelled the Governor and vice-Governor's offices as well as Gubernial Council of Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Within five months from the date the law was declared the election to the Council of Subcarpathian Ruthenia was to be announced. The first session of the Council was to be summoned by the President of the Republic within one month form the day the elections were held. The members of the Government were to be appointed by the President of the Republic proposed by the Council Presidency. Autonomous government was to be responsible for its actions to the autonomous Council of Subcarpathian Ruthenia.¹⁰

Autonomy Act consolidated and stabilized the position of the autonomous government and the powers which stood behind the government. Even before 28th October, the government had stopped the activity of 14 political parties and organizations, with the biggest impact on Russo-Ruthenian political orientation. The mainstay of the regime was represented by *Ukrainian National Union* headed by Fedor Revay and *Carpathian Sich*¹¹ by Dmytro Klympush. After the clash with Polish police Carpathian Sich was strengthened by a number by refugees from Halych, who fled to Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Carpathian Sich caused Voloshyn's government serious problems. Their

⁶ Sterčo, Petro: *Karpato-Ukrajins'ka deržava. Do istoriji vyzvol'noji borot'by karpats'kych ukrajinciv u 1919-1939 rokach*. Lviv: Atlas, 1994, p. 177.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁸ Suško, Ladislav: *op. cit.*, p. 160.

⁹ Kotowski, Albert S.: „Ukrainisches Piemont“? Die Karpatenukraine am Vorabend des Zweiten

Weltkrieges. In *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 49/2001, p. 67 etc.

¹⁰ Pop, Ivan: *op. cit.*, p. 375.

¹¹ About paramilitary organization *Carpathian Sich (Karpats'ka Sič)*, its structure, commanders and officers see more Sterčo, Petro: *Karpato-Ukrajins'ka deržava. Do istoriji vyzvol'noji borot'by karpats'kych ukrajinciv u 1919-1939 rokach*. Lviv: Atlas, 1994, p. 80 etc.

ideas went completely outside of the vision kept by local population as well as Khust government. They did not represent support but on the contrary, often an obstacle to the consolidation of the situation in the country.¹²

On 25th November, the autonomous government issued the regulation about the introduction of Ukrainian language as the official language on the territory of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which was outside its jurisdiction.

On 30th November, Emil Hacha was elected a new president. On 1st December, the President appointed a new central government led by Rudolf Beran and a new autonomous government in which A. Voloshyn and J. Revay remained the members of the government. E. Bachyn'skyi, the representative of Russophile-Ruthenian orientation, lost the position in the government.

Voloshyn's government strove to enforce the stability of the country from inside and outside. In foreign policy Voloshyn tried to achieve stability by increased orientation on cooperation with Germany. On 30th December 1938, autonomous government issued a regulation concerning the official title of the country, which stated that the term *Carpatho-Ukraine* can be used up to the Council's definitive decision on the title of Subcarpathian Ruthenia (from 1927 as the *Subcarpathian Land*). This was another violation of constitutional law n. 328/1938 Collection of laws and regulations by the autonomous government.

Tension, however, did not disappear. Ukrainian movement worsened the relationships with Poland which had certain worries about formation of "Great Ukraine". Central Prague government understood the situation in Subcarpathian Ruthenia was serious and thus on 16th January 1939 the President Hacha appointed on the Government's proposal General Lev Prchala a minister of autonomous government which was met with considerable resistance. However, the compromise was achieved when General's competence was formally narrowed only to the Ministry of Transport. As a matter of fact, in case of need it was an order to suppress Ukrainian nationalist movement.

On 20th January 1939, the Decree to the elections to the Council of Subcarpathian Land/Carpatho-Ukraine was published. Application of particular political parties to participate in the elections had to be sent until 22nd January. Decree confidentiality was intentional.

Autonomous government assumed that Russophile-Ruthenian opposition would fail to register application on time and thus would be automatically excluded from the participation in elections. At the meeting of the representatives of former Russophile-Ruthenian parties and organizations in Khust, *Association of Subcarpathian Ruthenians* was established, which managed to submit an application and the list of candidates to the elections to the Council. The application was not accepted and listed candidates arrested by members of Carpathian Sich. Political representatives of Russophile orientation did not agree with such election because of intimidation coming from Ukrainian nationalists and therefore asked the President Hacha to cancel the elections.¹³

Elections to the autonomous council were held on 12th February in accordance with single candidate slate whereby all the candidates of the ruling party, *Ukrainian National Union*, were included. Polling stations and census were under control of the members of Carpathian Sich. The ruling party won elections with 92.54% of all valid votes.¹⁴

On 6th March Beran's government decided to intervene decisively into the conditions in Carpatho-Ukraine. On government's proposal the president Hácha appointed a new autonomous government. Julian Revay dropped out of the government. Beside Voloshyn and Prchala, Stepan Klochurak became a new minister responsible for economics, health and social care.

On the night of 13th to 14th March so called General Staff of Carpathian Sich carried out a coup against autonomous government the Czechoslovak Army troops in Khust. However the attack of *the Siches* on military camp was repelled. In the morning of 14th March, Hungarian troops (with the consent of Berlin) began attack along the entire length of demarcation line. General Lev Prchala ordered the counterattack. However, the situation changed at breakneck pace, Slovak

¹³ Request of the representatives of pro-Russian orientation to the President of the Republic for reorganization of the autonomous government and cancellation of the elections to the Council of Subcarpathian Ruthenia/Carpatho-Ukraine because of intimidation of pro-Russian supporters by Ukrainian nationalists. *Archive of the President's Office (Archiv kanceláře prezidenta republiky)* in Prague, fund of the President's Office, box 15, inventory number 923, signature *Subcarpathian Rus'* 45/39.

¹⁴ Sterčo, Petro: *op. cit.*, p. 129. Complete results see *ibid.*, pp. 242-252.

¹² Suško, Ladislav: *op. cit.*, p. 161.



"HENRI COANDA"
AIR FORCE ACADEMY
ROMANIA



"GENERAL M.R. STEFANIK"
ARMED FORCES ACADEMY
SLOVAK REPUBLIC

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE of SCIENTIFIC PAPER
AFASES 2012

Brasov, 24-26 May 2012

Council declared independent Slovak State. Subcarpathian Ruthenia/Carpatho-Ukraine as an autonomous part of the Czechoslovak Republic found itself in the state power vacuum. A.Voloshyn announced Prague by phone call that the only possibility is the declaration of independence of Carpatho-Ukraine. In his last conversation Voloshyn thanked the President Hacha to all the Czechs for twenty years of cooperation. Such a gesture was not expressed by any of minorities' leaders in Czechoslovakia.¹⁵

On that day A.Voloshyn declared the independence of Carpatho-Ukraine and the composition of a new government. He asked German government to take Carpatho- Ukraine under protection and establish Protectorate. On 15th October General Lev Prchala did not take hold of Chief Command of Czechoslovak troops in Carpatho-Ukraine and entrusted General Oleg Svatek to manage retreat. On the same day in the afternoon the first and the last session of the Council of Subcarpathian Ruthenia/Carpatho-Ukraine took place at Secondary Grammar School (Gymnazium) in Khust. The Council declared the independence of Carpatho-Ukraine. Avhustyn Voloshyn was appointed the President of Carpatho-Ukraine and Julian Revay in his absence the Prime Minister. In the late hours of the same day Voloshyn summoned both the first and the last session of the Government. It was agreed not to resist the Hungarian Army and hand over the power to the army. The members of the government had to decide how to proceed further. Avhustyn Volshyn effectively dissolved the Government of Carpatho-Ukraine and travelled to Khust.¹⁶

Czechoslovak military troops were organized to leave the territory of Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Substantial part of the troops managed to get to Slovakia while the remaining part of the troops managed to beat through ceding Hungarian Army into Romanian territory. Ceding Hungarian troops had to face beside the resistance of *the Sichts* also armed but not trained secondary school students from Sevlyush and Khust, who lost their lives

there.¹⁷ On 18th March 1939 in the late night hours, Hungarian army finished occupation of the territory of Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Hungarian Prime Minister, Pal Teleki, could declare in Hungarian Parliament on 16th October that Carpatho-Ukraine was occupied by Hungarian military troops in accordance with the "wishes Carpatho-Ukrainian people".¹⁸ Hungarian members of the Parliament renamed Subcarpathian Ruthenia/Carpatho-Ukraine into *Carpathian Territory (Karpataljai terület)*, or *Karpatalja*.

Short existence of independent Carpatho-Ukraine ended up this way. Finally when Subcarpathian representatives' dreams about their own country were fulfilled, it came to its early end. In fact, disaster had already begun with Hungarian occupation of Carpatho-Ukraine before the declaration of independence. Although Avhustyn Voloshyn in Khust and Julian Revay actually directly in Budapest tried to gain guarantees for protection of Carpatho-Ukraine, it was Berlin which allowed Budapest to occupy and annex the region and this decision sealed their fate. Many had known long before, the new little country would not have a chance to survive and this was its tragedy.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- [1] Borák, Mečislav: *Obrana Podkarpatské Rusi*. In *Česko-slovenská historická ročenka 1997*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1997, pp. 165-178.
- [2] Fano, Štefan: *Zakarpatská Ukrajina v politických kalkuláciách susedných štátov v období od Mníchova po marec 1939*. In *Slovanské štúdie XI. História*. Bratislava: Veda, 1971, pp. 61-79.
- [3] Gebhart, Jan – Kuklík, Jan: *Druhá republika 1938-1939. Svár demokracie a totality v politickém, spoločenském a kulturním živote*. Praha: Paseka, 2004.

¹⁵ Pop, Ivan: *op. cit.*, p. 386-387.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 389.

¹⁷ Veheš, Mykola Mychajlovyč – Zadorožnyj, Volodymyr Jevhenovyč: *Velyč i trahedija Karpats'koji Ukrajiny*. Užhorod: Patent, 1993, pp. 45-46.

¹⁸ Švorc, Peter: *op. cit.*, p. 100.

- [4] Hořec, Jaromír (ed.): *Dokumenty o Podkarpatské Rusi*. Praha: Česká expedice, 1997.
- [5] Hrančák, Ivan et al.: *Narysy istoriji Zakarpatt'a. Tom II (1918-1945)*. Užhorod: Zakarpatt'a, 1995.
- [6] Kotowski, Albert S.: „Ukrainisches Piemont“? Die Karpatenukraine am Vorabend des Zweiten Weltkrieges. In *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 49/2001, pp. 67-95.
- [7] Koźmiński, Maciej: *Polska i Węgry przed drugą wojną światową (październik 1938 – wrzesień 1939). Z dziejów dyplomacji i irredenty*. Wrocław – Warszawa – Kraków: Wydawnictwo PAN, 1970.
- [8] Magocsi, Paul Robert: *The Shaping of a National Identity. Subcarpathian Rus' 1848 -1948*. London – Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1978.
- [9] Magocsi, Paul Robert – Pop, Ivan (eds.): *Encyclopedia of Rusyn History and Culture*. Toronto – Buffalo – London: University of Toronto Press, 2005.
- [10] Mosný, Peter: *Podkarpatská Rus. Nerealizovaná autonómia*. Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2001.
- [11] Pop, Ivan: *Dějiny Podkarpatské Rusi v datech*. Praha: Libri, 2005.
- [12] Pop, Ivan: *Podkarpatská Rus – osobnosti její historie, vědy a kultury*. Praha: Libri, 2008.
- [13] Sterčo, Petro: *Karpato-Ukrajins'ka deržava. Do istoriji vyzvol'noji borot'by karpats'kych ukrajinciv u 1919-1939 rokach*. Lviv: Atlas, 1994.
- [14] Suško, Ladislav: Podkarpatská Rus ako autonómna krajina pomníchovskej – druhej ČSR. In *Česko-slovenská historická ročenka 1997*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 1997, pp. 145-163.
- [15] Švorc, Peter: *Zakliata krajina. Podkarpatská Rus 1918-1946*. Prešov: Universum, 1996.
- [16] Švorc, Peter: *Krajinská hranica medzi Slovenskom a Podkarpatskou Rusou v medzivojnovom období (1919-1939)*. Prešov: Universum, 2003.
- [17] Švorc, Peter – Danilák, Michal – Heppner, Harald (eds.): *Veľká politika a malé regióny. Malé regióny vo veľkej politike, veľká politika v malých regiónoch. Karpatský priestor v medzivojnovom období (1918-1939)*. Prešov – Graz: Universum, 2002.
- [18] Veheš, Mykola Mychajlovyč – Zadorožnyj, Volodymyr Jevhenovyč: *Velyč i trahedija Karpats'koji Ukrajiny*. Užhorod: Patent, 1993.