

Loss of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia at the End of World War 2

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Czechoslovakia came by Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia completely unexpectedly after World War 1. The Republic tried with dedication to help the Slavonic population of the region, hardly aware of their nationality, get rid of poverty and ignorance. Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, however, did not fit into the concept of Czechoslovak statehood. Some Czechoslovak politicians (e.g. Karel Kramář) only perceived the mission of the Republic at Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia as the role of a “faithful trustee” that should hand Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia over to Russia when the right time comes. On the other hand, Czechoslovak Communists called the region Trans-Carpathian Ukraine as early as 1920s and alleged that the local Slavonic population are Ukrainians. The Republic did not want to get involved in the ethnic development.

At the time of the “Second Republic”, power in Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia was seized by Ukrainian Nationalists, who colluded with Nazis. The former saw Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia as kind of Ukrainian Piemont, which would unite all Ukrainians in one state, while the latter found it a perfect tool to destabilize the USSR by opening up the hot Ukrainian issue. Relations of Czechoslovak security services to Ukrainian Nationalists were really bad. Ukrainian Nationalists were quite rightly looked upon as Nazi idolaters and collaborators, who would not stop at threatening with anti-Czech pogroms, and the uprising of Ukrainian Nationalists against the Czechoslovak state was the culmination of the long-standing controversy. Nearly concurrently, however, Hungarian occupation came and quickly put an end to these clashes.

In the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, Ukrainian Nationalists received political asylum from the Nazis, as well as jobs in the Protectorate administration and the *Reichsprotektor* office, which met a really negative attitude from those Czech officials and security men who had born a grudge against them since the Second Republic period. The just emerging home Resistance movement did try to infiltrate Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia as well but had to give these attempts up because of interventions of Gestapo and emigration of some of the persons involved. Then only the owners of real estate left in Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia were still interested in that region. They got some compensation from both the Protectorate and German government but from 1941 on it was only done by force of habit.

Czechoslovak exile had strong desire for any prominent personalities from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, and above all, for any information from the area, but this was hardly satisfied. Particular exiles from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia co-operated with each other very little, getting lost in personal and language controversies. Although there had been a representative of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia

in Czechoslovak National Council since the beginning, only in late 1942, as the communist Ivan Petruscak came, the Council obtained a representative able to efficiently and loyally co-operate not only in Ruthenian but also in general Czechoslovak issues.

The advance of the Red Army towards the borders of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia made the exile representation to sign agreements with USSR to secure non-interference in Czechoslovak internal affairs as well as to provide modalities of transfer of administration in liberated areas to Czechoslovak authorities. Connected with that was frantic activity in preparation of plans for reconstruction, relief and specification of legal framework for administration of the liberated territory. At the same time, the exile government badly suffered from lack of information from Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, and its attempts at intelligence infiltration by groups of paratroopers failed. In addition, the Ruthenian home resistance suffered huge losses from Hungarian occupants, as did the Soviet groups too. As a result, active resistance was not restored before 1944, and then it was fully dominated by Soviet partisans.

The arrival of the Government Delegate Office and its subordinate Liberated Areas Headquarters in the autumn 1944 meant a hope for the exile government to return home soon. Activities of both said authorities, although promising at first, were eliminated in a few weeks by the activity of the separatist National Council of Trans-Carpathian Ukraine, which pursued the goal of annexation of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia to Soviet Ukraine. This movement, partly spontaneous and partly promoted by Soviet security services, easily took over initiative and real power. Czechoslovak exile, including the communists, was unpleasantly surprised and overtaken by events, but the prospective cession of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia to the USSR had been mentioned several times in talks of representatives of the two countries, even though from the Soviet part always accompanied with assurances that Czechoslovakia must be restored in its pre-Munich borders, including Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia. It seems that Ukrainian communists, having learned a lesson from the events in Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia during the period of the Second Republic, wanted to take advantage of the course of war events in order to unite all Ukrainians in one country, and Stalin gave them a free hand in this case. In case of failure he could disavow the affair, and in the opposite case he could achieve Moscow's old strategic goal - to possess some area behind the Carpathian Mountains.

The post-war Czechoslovakia had no problem to make and ratify an agreement ceding Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, a region it nearly lost the ties with as a result of the events of the Second Republic and the Protectorate. For both parties, the issues of the population transfer and property settlement, in turn, involved tortuous negotiations, sabotaged by the wilful representatives of Trans-Carpathian Ukraine.

