

Theses of (PhD) dissertation

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The formation of today's Transcarpathia's borders after World War I. (1918-1925)

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I. The antecedents of the research, the presentation of the research questions

The formation of today's Transcarpathia's (or Subcarpathia's) borders after World War I was a long and complicated process which lasted for many years and caused a lot of disputes. Even before the final borders were designated, several states participated in these debates.

By the outbreak of the world war, Subcarpathia – in its current meaning – was not existing. At most it was functioning as a regional unit, as a result of the highland subsidy action organized by the Hungarian government to support the Ruthenian population living in the region. This, however, was more like an economic unit, rather than a regional unit in the classical sense. The region was shaped by the treaties that closed the war, and the territorial discussions following them. The goal of my study is to analyze this formation process, specifically from the point of view of the region Subcarpathia or Transcarpathia as it is called today.

The problem of the territorial belonging of the region has a rich scientific literature which was written in Czech, English, Hungarian, Ukrainian, Russian and Slovak. Source materials connected with the issue can be found in the archives of Transcarpathia, Budapest, Prague, Romania, Poland and even the United States. During my research, I have not had an opportunity to carry out research in Poland and Romania.

The Hungarian literature, in general, focuses on the designation of the Hungarian border. This, however, is only the shortest section of Subcarpathia's borders between 1919-1938. A brief analysis of the Romanian and Polish sections of the borders is given in the works of József Botlik. The Czechoslovak and, separately, the Czech and Slovak authors place the emphasis on the study of either the internal Slovak-Ruthenian border or the entire Czechoslovak-Hungarian border. The question of the Romanian and Polish borders – in the literature written between the two world wars – appears only in the work of Alois Hora and Fedor Houdek, who give only a general description of the territorial debates between Czechoslovakia and Romania.

Although the problem of the Czechoslovak-Polish border is well studied in the Czechoslovak literature, it concerns only those sections which separate the Czech and Slovak regions from Poland. In the Ukrainian studies the question of Subcarpathian borders is rarely discussed, and even if it is, it focuses on the Western border which separates the Slovaks and the Ruthenians. As we know, during the shaping of some detached regions, the interests of the

Hungarian population were hardly taken into account, as the Hungarians lost the war and “oppressed” their minorities.

It would be logical to assume that in the case of Subcarpathia, which was annexed to Czechoslovakia as a Ruthenian region, the interests of the Ruthenians were taken into account. Thus, in my study I examine the events mostly from their points of view. Even though the Ruthenians were on the victor’s side during post war “peacemaking”, they were not handled as they should have been. In my opinion, it is necessary to provide a research which studies the question of Subcarpathia’s borders from the point of view of the region itself, by contrasting different standpoints, and not from the aspects of the region’s “host states”.

The purpose of my research is to introduce the different territorial aspirations on the today’s Transcarpathia; to analyze the concepts of native Ruthenians and the ones who were living in the USA as emigrants; to outline the steps of the Hungarian governments towards the organization of the Ruthenian self-government which aimed to retain their region; to examine whether the “principal of ethnicity” was effectuated during the resolution of the question of territorial belonging and during the designation of the borders of Subcarpathia.

II. The structure of the dissertation. Literature and source groups used during the research

Today’s Subcarpathia was attached to a newborn European state, Czechoslovakia, according to the treaty of Saint Germain en Laye, signed on the 10th of September 1919. It was detached from Hungary on the basis of president Woodrow Wilson’s principles, in particular, the one which proclaimed that each nation must have a right to self-determination. During my research, I am following the events which had an influence on the decision which became legal when the above mentioned treaty was signed, according to which Subcarpathia became a part of Czechoslovakia in the questioned period.

To clarify the process, I extended the chronological frame (1918-1925) of the dissertation. During World War I, there were certain concepts about where the Ruthenian land should belong. The Russian Empire was the first one which had claims on it. T.G. Masaryk, the future president of Czechoslovakia was aware of this, that is why he wanted to define the Eastern borders of his state along the river Ung. These concepts are described in the first part of the first chapter, in order to clarify the territorial claims the involved states expressed at the Paris peace conference.

Masaryk's propaganda played a significant role in the detachment of Subcarpathia, by means of which he managed to win over the Ruthenian community living in the USA. The activity of emigrant Ruthenian groups are examined in a separate part of my thesis. For the examination of this part, I studied the documents stored in the Archives of the Office of the President of the Czech Republic, and the Archives of the T.G. Masaryk Institute. In the mentioned institutions I worked with the original copies of the statements and declarations issued by certain organizations and national councils. Regarding the presentation of the events in the USA, there are significant discrepancies in the literature depending on the language it was written. During the examination of the problem, I compared the standpoints of various authors, and also compared them with the original documents.

By the time, the Ruthenians living in Hungary started to organize their national council, their brothers in emigration had already made the decision regarding their fate. The local Ruthenians started to set up their councils during October-November 1918, and their concepts concerning their land were very different. The councils located in Eperjes (today Presov, Slovakia), Ungvár (today Uzhhorod, Ukraine), Máramaros county, Huszt (today Khust, Ukraine) and Máramarossziget (today Sighetu Marmăției, Romania) used to represent various trends, which are studied in the third part. The activity of the national councils were examined through the scientific literature and the documents stored on microfilms of the National Archives of Hungary such as the Minutes of Council of Ministers, official letters and reports. In addition, a lot of useful information is available in the works of József Botlik and Ivan Pop.

Chapter I is closed with the examination of the concepts of the creation of the autonomous district of Russka Kraina.

Although the period of time covered by the second chapter is short in time (December 23, 1918 – May 8, 1919), it is really rich in events. Russka-Kraina was established, its borders, however, remained an opened question. According to the declarations published in the contemporary local press, it appears that it was impossible to designate the Ruthenian territory as an ethnically homogenous unit. The first part of the chapter examines this question. Disputes on this issue were interrupted by the various interventions of the neighboring states' invading forces which began in January 1919, thus, a productive decision in this question was never made.

The occupation of different parts of the region is described in a separate part. The Czechoslovak, Ukrainian and Romanian invading troops were trying to fulfill their earlier concepts, and claimed that they were acting according to the decisions of the Entente, or in protection of their ethnic minorities living in the region.

In December 1918, the representatives of the Ruthenians living in Hungary were invited to a Great Congress in Budapest. The main topic was the future of the nation and the creation of Russka-Kraina. At the congress, the participants of the event decided to organize another congress in January. It was held on January 21, 1919 in Huszt. The Ukrainian history often refers to the Congress of Huszt which stated that the Ruthenians are willing to unite with the Ukrainian nation. Nonetheless, it is important to mention that the congress did not cover the total Ruthenian community of Subcarpathia, therefore, it is essential to examine the events of the Congress, and to compare the opinions regarding it.

The further part of the dissertation describe the activity of the national councils. By the end of 1918, the Czechoslovak army occupied the Upperland until the Ung river, and they took over Ungvár on 12th January, 1919. These conditions had a massive influence on the decisions that were made by the Ruthenian national councils in the occupied territories regarding the future of Subcarpathia. The actions of the councils located in Eperjes and Ungvár, however, were still not accorded. I emphasize these differences, and the rapid change of the Ruthenian leaders' opinion in the fourth part of Chapter II. In January-February 1919, the Ruthenian leaders were in an intense correspondence with the Czech officials regarding the occupation of the region and the Ruthenian "territorial claims", therefore, I pay particular attention to the detailed examination of this correspondance.

It is important to study the events of the Paris peace conference – opened on the 18th of January 1919 – from the point of view of the Ruthenians. There was no Hungarian question at the conference, because the Entente guaranteed the loyalty of the new Central-European states by sharing Hungary's territory. Therefore, I think that the examination of the Ruthenians' interests should not be ignored, since during the negotiations, the Czechoslovak delegation – in case of a dispute with Romania which also had territorial claims on certain parts of today's Subcarpathia – often emphasized the Ruthenian community's interests as a point of reference. Knowing the Ruthenian claims and the Czech promises helps us to gain a better understanding of the claims and harms the Ruthenians had when they were already part of Czechoslovakia.

Due to the decisions that were made at the negotiations in Paris, the communists seized power in Hungary. They ruled Subcarpathia only for 40 days. Nonetheless, the leaders of the Republic of Councils were acting intensively. Although they defined the territory which should belong to the administration of Russka-Krajna, it had no practical value, as most of it was under foreign occupation. Once the power of the Council in Russka Kraina fell by the end of April, the Ruthenian national councils gathered in Ungvár on the 8th of May, to unite in a

central council. The leaders of these councils met with Gregory Zsatkovics, the representative of the Ruthenians in the USA. He outlined the benefits which the Ruthenians would gain from the union with Czechoslovakia. The Central Ruthenian National Council was formed at the congress. It is expedient to close the chapter with this event, since – on the one hand – the territorial belonging of Subcarpathia generated no further debates, on the other hand, the real discussion of the borders came only after this.

Except for two paragraphs, the whole third chapter deals with the definition and designation of Subcarpathia's borders. In the summer of 1919, the negotiations between the Ruthenian and Czechoslovak parts stopped until the closure of the military conflicts with the Hungarian Republic of Councils. The Ruthenian leaders had talks in Prague at the end of May, later this task was assigned to Zsatkovics. Once the Republic of Councils gave up the Ruthenian land, the negotiations continued. Before the treaty of Saint Germain was signed, Hungary and Romania were informed via Entente instructions about their borders with Czechoslovakia on the 12th of June and 7th of August accordingly. The border between Slovakia and Ruthenia however was declared as temporary. The examination of Zsatkovics's negotiations in July and August is very important in order to understand the circumstances of the formation of Subcarpathia's Western border. Here we can see how the proclaimed ethnic principal was neglected in cases when the claims were about the victor's achieved territories.

The debates regarding the border between Slovakia and Podkarpatska Rus (as the region was called in that time) were going on during the region's entire Czechoslovak period of history. With respect to the fact that the scope of the dissertation is limited, the question is described in details only until the resignation of Zsatkovics which took place in May 1921, concerning the period afterwards only the main events are mentioned.

It is not a duty of the thesis to examine the circumstances of the signing of the treaty of Trianon, however, a brief description of the question is given in a separate point of the part dedicated to the designation of the Hungarian border of the studied region, in order to give a better understanding of the dissertation's topic.

In the further parts of the thesis, during the study of the designation of the Hungarian, Romanian and Polish sections of Subcarpathia's borders, a detailed description of work of the delimitation committees is given. The description of the Hungarian-Czechoslovak delimitation committee was made on the basis of the studies of János Suba, the documents of the Hungarian-Czechoslovak delimitation committee found in the National Archives of Hungary and the Almanacs of the Czechoslovak Republic.

The delimitation work at the Romanian and Polish sections of the region's border were reconstructed from the monthly reports made and sent by the delimitation committees, and designation boards located in the National Archives of the Czech Republic, as well as the documents located in the Regional State Archives of Transcarpathia. The study presents the official activity of the delimitation committees, as well as the process and the closure of fieldwork done by them. With respect to the fact that the length of the dissertation is limited, the question of private property losses is not examined in the dissertation.

III. Research methodology

During the research, I worked with a large amount of documents and groups of documents. Due to this, the selection of the documents was a difficult task to deal with. Although the topic has a relatively short chronological frame, it has a huge amount of source materials in the Czech archives. Most of those documents are a blind spot for the Hungarian researchers, which can be seen in the Hungarian related literature, therefore, the problem of today's Transcarpathia's border creation in 1918-1925 requires further and deeper research. During the research, I followed the structure described above, which allowed me to combine the descriptive and comparative methods. At the beginning of the dissertation – while studying the aspirations of different states on the questioned region – both of the methods were used, just as during the description and comparison of concepts of the different Ruthenian national councils and other groups in the region and overseas. While examining the designation of the definitive borders, the descriptive method prevails..

Since the actions of the Ruthenian emigrant groups are subjects of intense debates in history, I have had an opportunity to compare the points of views and opinions harvested from related literature written in different languages and periods, and then make my own conclusions, using the information found in original archival documents.

As a conclusion, I can say that during the research I studied the various questions with respect to the available source and literature base, which often determined the choice of the used research method. Beside the parallel use of the descriptive and comparative methods, I was also trying to combine the two.

IV. Scientific results of the research.

In my study I followed the goals that I pointed out in the introduction of the thesis, and showed that at the outbreak of World War I, several states with different interests, such as the Russian Empire, Romania, the Ukrainian National Republic, the Western Ukrainian National Republic stated claims on today's Transcarpathia or at least on certain parts of it, while the ones who dreamed about Czechoslovakia and finally achieved it, stated their claims only at the very end of the War. It is important to mention that certain Czech emigrant circles in Russia counted with the possibility of incorporating the Ruthenian land, and these territorial claims, however, matched those of the Russian Empire.

I found in my research that the Ruthenian community was not unitary. I showed this through the presentation of the actions of many of their representative organizations. The onetime pro Russian American Ruthenians - when the bolsheviks seized power in Russia – became the advocates of Czechoslovakia, while others, living in the USA as well, were supporting the integrity with Hungary or the union with Galicia, some of them were supporting the idea of an independent Ruthenian state. As the Ruthenian emigrants were convinced, the fate of Subcarpathia was determined, the ones who made the final decision, however, experienced very few of the consequences of it, because they were only observing the events from overseas.

It was impossible to stand up for integrity with Hungary, as the Ruthenians living there were divided in their concepts. The Ruthenian intelligentsia was caring about its position, therefore, their decisions and steps were taken accordingly. Thus, it is not surprising that Augustin Volosin, who declared his loyalty to Hungary in November 1918, was asking for the Czechoslovakian occupation as soon as possible in January 1919. Based on the events one can conclude that the Ruthenian leaders were more interested in keeping their leading positions, than in improving their people's life conditions.

The Hungarian government led by Mihály Károlyi issued the Public Law №10 of 1918 however it had no opportunity to implement it in practice. By the establishment of Russka-Kraina, Hungary fulfilled the Ruthenian territorial claims which they never achieved in Czechoslovakia, but it happened only in theory. Sáros, Szepes, Zemplén county and most of Ung county had already been occupied by the time when the law was issued, thus, it was impossible to realize it successfully. The further actions and steps towards the designation of the regions' administrative borders were made even more difficult with the advancing occupation.

The designation of the borders, however, would not have been an easy task even in peaceful times. According to the debates published in the contemporary local press, one can conclude that the Hungarian and the Ruthenian population was so mixed in the lowland, that it would have been impossible to designate an administrative border without harming one of the nations. If Russka-Kraina had been formed from plain Ruthenian territory, it would not have had any railway junctions, any major towns and so on; if it had gained these areas, it would have also received a major Hungarian population, and – according to the press – Hungarians were not happy with that. In my opinion, even if Russka-Kraina's borders had been definitely designated, the shape of the detached Subcarpathia would not have been different from the one which was described in the Generálny Štatút, issued in November 1919, because the territory of the region was designated not on the basis of ethnicity.

In the times of the Republic of Councils, the question of Russka-Krajna's borders remained open, but it was meaningless as well, as since April 1919 the whole region was occupied by the Czechoslovak and Romanian armies.

The Hungarian governments tried to preserve the integrity of the Ruthenian land within Hungary, and they took some steps to realize this aim, but they did not have considerable results in practice, since the decisions about the territorial belonging of the region were already made. The cabinets of Mihály Károlyi, and later Dénes Berlinkey tried to keep the region in a political way, while the upcoming Republic of Councils – also in a military one. Both were unsuccessful.

The Ruthenians declared their willingness to join Czechoslovakia on the 8th of May 1919. They believed that they will benefit more than they got from Russka-Krajna. That is, they hoped they will gain a wider autonomy in Czechoslovakia than in Hungary. The concept actually seemed to be logical, because many of the Ruthenians were already under Czechoslovak rule, and it was certain that they will not get out of it. The fate of the rest of the territory was unclear, as Czechoslovakia and Romania were arguing over it, thus if they had to choose, the Czech alternative was the favorable one. They hoped that they would live united, as a separate unit, in a new state of a Slavic community. Gregory Zsatkovics, the representative of Ruthenian organizations operating in the USA ensured them about this, as he was charmed by the promises of Masaryk and Edvard Beneš, who pledged that “the borders will be designated in a way which makes the Ruthenians satisfied.”

Although the 10-13§ of the treaty of Saint Germain declared the Ruthenians' right to gain autonomy, it also stated that this should be organized by Czechoslovakia, between the borders defined by the Allied and Associated Powers. According to the new borders,

however, the Ruthenians became minorities in several states. They lost the Ruthenians of Máramaros, they failed to unite with the Lemkos living in Poland, and they were split apart by a line of demarcation from the Ruthenians who remained in Slovakia.

The external borders of the region, which were defined by the Conference, were out of Czechoslovakia's scope, but the Slovak-Ruthenian border belonged to it. The governors of the Podkarpatska Rus were trying to move the border and make it acceptable for the Ruthenians, but none of them was successful. The question of autonomy was also depending on this border. Theoretically, Czechoslovakia was ready to provide autonomy for Podkarpatska Rus, but the Ruthenians wanted to extend their land to the Ruthenian parts of Eastern Slovakia as well, and the Czechoslovak state never allowed that.

While defining the region's borders, the Czech government shared it generously to please its ally, Romania, without considering the interests of the region's inhabitants. During the delimitation of the Polish borders, the Czech government was struggling to keep all the Czech and Slovak territories. When Anton Beskid and the Lemkos living in Galicia claimed to attach the Lemko territory to the Carpathian Rus, they were talking about the very same Polish border line, E. Beneš, however, replied that they already have a territorial conflict with Poland, thus, they cannot afford another one.

Concerning the debate on the Slovak-Ruthenian border line, it was useless for the Ruthenians to ask for the modification of the line of demarcation between them and the Slovaks, in order to unite the people on both sides of it. It was out of chance, and it is visible from the negotiations between Beneš and Zsatskovics. Beneš explained him that the border which he is asking for won't be accepted by the Slovaks. The Slovaks were more valuable allies for the Czech leaders than the Ruthenians, therefore, they sacrificed Ruthenian territories to please the Slovaks, and not vice-versa. The same happened in the case with the Romanian section of Subcarpathian borders.

Romania and Czechoslovakia exchanged territories in May 1921. The losses of Podkarpatska Rus were not only territorial. The region also lost mineral resources, valuable grape yards and baths. And it lost Ruthenian inhabitants, too, since the detached territory was inhabited by Ruthenians, Hungarians and Germans. The territory that the region gained was clearly Hungarian, and it also received some fields suitable for agriculture. And again, the Ruthenian-Hungarian territory was sacrificed for the sake of the Czechoslovakian-Romanian friendship. Therefore, we can conclude that during the delimitation and the resolution of the question of territorial belonging of Subcarpathia and certain parts of it, the principle of ethnicity barely prevailed.

The delimitation of today's Transcarpathia was a long and complicated process, which ignored the interest and rights of not only the members of the defeated nation who were the inhabitants of the questioned region, but also the rights and interests of the nation which stood on the victor's side during the "peacemaking". The right to the self-determination was deprived, the ethnical principal failed.

It is not an aim of the dissertation to demonize the Czech leaders, or the Supreme Powers of the Paris Peace Conference, neither to canonize the Hungarian governments. At the same time, we cannot argue that the Ruthenian leaders were led only by selflessness and the will to serve their people. All parties involved aimed to achieve their own benefits, just like the Supreme Powers that created the new order, ignoring the fact that by the way they did it, they sew the seeds of a new upcoming destruction.

V. Acknowledgments.

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VI. Publications.

Comparison of the administrative situation of Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa and Máramaros counties between 1900-1904. Published in the Scientific Journal of Students at Uzhorod National University (2008, only author).

Elections of 1900 in Ung, Bereg, Máramaros and Ugocsa counties. Published in Ukrainian, in the Scientific Journal of Uzhorod National University (2010, only author.)

The antecedents of detachment of today's Transcarpathia: the creation of Russka-Kraina autonomous district. Published in Scientia Denique, the Scientific journal of the Association of Transcarpathian Hungarian speaking Students and Young Researchers. (2012, only author.)

Migration in Transcarpathia, after the attachment of the region to Czechoslovakia. Published in Scientia Denique, the Scientific journal of the Association of Transcarpathian Hungarian speaking Students and Young Researchers. (2014, only author.)