

# OUR VISION

3<sup>rd</sup> Edition

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## DEDICATION

To future generations of Rusyns. I hope that we  
will create a legacy worthy of following.



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# 1

## INTRODUCTION

In a sea of progress, our people's ship still drifts aimlessly with the current. There can be no counter to the fact that the Rusyn nation is the strongest it has been in the last 75 years; however, one should see this growth as mostly regeneration, rather than expansion. We have returned to the level of national consciousness that we once had, but the next steps forward will be even harder than those that came before.

Historically, our community has always lacked the cohesiveness and national identity required to further Rusyn culture or spirit, without incredible difficulty. Completely opposite to the people of the plains, who could communicate easily between towns and larger cultural areas, we did not have such luxury. Similar to that of ancient Greco-Bactria-

ns and Turkic tribesman of the Hindu Kush, or Caucasians from the mountain range by the same name, local identity and regional culture has almost always taken a higher priority.

Opposite to our people, the Slovaks and Ukrainians were already well on their way to forming concrete identities with high culture by the start of the early twentieth century. Our results, during this period, were underwhelming in comparison. Subsequently, this provided us with insurmountable challenges that we are only just now getting over.

The purpose of this book is neither to criticize our ancestors past the actions' usefulness, nor shout into the sky for personal relief. There can be no counter to the notion that a wide array of challenges and philosophical issues face the Rusyn nation. Many of these are either non-starters or have not crossed the mind of what someone could consider our "intelligentsia". It is within this book that I wish to challenge our current perceptions and reveal hidden issues that we will need to face in the future.

Current strategies and ideas have long passed their optimal useability. The "game" that was known in 1990, and prior, is radically different and more complex than before. Instead of the fight against crude authoritarian oppression, we now face a smarter, multilateral offensive. Our people are no longer forced by the cutlass at our throats, but by the entic-

ing cake of the enemy. A cultural and identity battle against a state much more capable, and strategic than our own.

When a nation lacks the resources and expertise to match its opponent, several things must be in place for any hope of success. While a Ukrainian state has the luxury to throw ideas and capital at the wall until a few of them stick, Rusyns lack this benefit.

At this stage, there should be no questions about who qualifies as one of us and who does not. What constitutes the Rusyn nation, and, more importantly, what does not. We still do not have this fully realized yet. Can we say Hutsuls and Boykos are an integral part of the Rusyn people? Do the benefits of their inclusion outweigh the political difficulties that come with it? These questions are not fully decided yet, nor are they often even brought up within normal discourse. The above being just a few of the many issues that have remained answered.

There is also the problem of uncertain goals, and the inability to work together on a grand scale. I doubt most members of our intelligentsia have any agreed upon plan, other than some vague “establish cultural autonomy in Transcarpathia and cultural survival in the diaspora”. While most of the population stays at the level of remembering Christmas traditions and what Baba told them, the top cannot

afford this luxury. We must be the ones who guide the path forward.

These two issues alone continue to hold us back from the progress we could be making. This is not even including issues such as our geopolitical reality, Russophilia, and other equally important topics.

In total, there are nine separate essays contained within this book. Each is an attempt to put down on paper what I feel is so often ignored. A text simply stating all of these concerns could be written in a handful of pages; however, all of these issues must be examined within greater detail.

A small pamphlet telling of all the negative outcomes and challenges can only go so far in catapulting a nation forward. We must be so familiar, and planned, with these objectives and concerns, that even outnumbered, and outspent, we can still become victorious.

## FLAWS OF RUSYN UNITY

Historical precedence for the Rusyn identity began somewhere within the nineteenth century. Before this, Rusyns were known as such; however, they could hardly be called a nation. This is to say, at least not in the same way as Poles or Russians. Reasons are abound for why our history happened this way. Chief among these is the ethnographic history and geographical layout of Carpathian Rus'.

While the Rusyn ethnic group grabs its name from the Kievan Rus', this name, in many ways, does us a great disservice. The problem lies in the historical roots of this nation and how they connect to the present day. At no point in a long history did the ancestors of today's Rusyns have their own state or province on Carpathian Rus' land. The majority of its time, even during the period of the Kievan Rus'

was spent under Hungarian control. The only exception to this was a small period under the Volhynians, who by all accounts had little real power and were separated by the Carpathians from the south.

What does all of it mean? Knowing this, we cannot take the story of being descendants of Rus' as the only important fact to consider. In all reality, we were more of a collective of different tribes on the outskirts of East Slavic society than any integral part. At this point probably a mix of White Croats (whose history probably begins before Rus') and of Rus' emigres from Volhynia and Podolia. This, in effect, muddies the waters for an easy way to produce a convincing national origin story, as well as opening the door for Ukrainian propaganda.

Now comes the second hurdle to overcome; our Vlach ancestry is something which cannot be overlooked, and, somehow, our intellectuals have forgotten about most of its existence. What started in the early centuries of the second millennium, forever changed what it means to be a Rusyn.

These Vlachs added something that in many ways, we should be incredibly thankful for and use to our advantage. I would argue that the influence from these Balkan people forever differentiated us from that of Ukrainians. A specific heritage that Galician outsiders do not possess. They changed our people culturally, ethnically, and spiritually.

This group of foreigners brought many of the pastoral and nomadic practices which changed how people lived, along with this linguistic and ethnic melting, to a scale that is hard to quantify. The Vlachs had been so integrated that we were even called by the dual moniker of Vlach-Rusyn. Over time it lost its ethnic connotation, but the origin of it is still a valuable bit of history. Though their numbers were likely too small to completely takeover Rusyn language and identity, no one can discount its importance.

Around this time is also what can be referred to as the Great Westward Expansion. We began to colonize what are now our homelands in Lemkovyna and Slovakia. Where Germanics and Slovaks could not survive, we could truly thrive. Their agriculture practices did not suit the terrain, but our pastoral habits and ability to defend the kingdoms borders became quite useful to the nobility in charge. With this, we spread out far and wide, reaching into central Slovakia. A great accomplishment I would say, and a necessity for such a small ethnic group, even if it was largely unintentional. For the higher the population and geographic area of a people, the harder it is for them to be eradicated.

The land of Carpathian Rus' encourages regional separation and disunity within its DNA. An area so rugged, and difficult, that not even a central government for most of its history could control it. With an

inability to cross between towns easily, or a need to conform to the great government, a certain cultural diversity developed.

This fact is readily apparent with the Rusyn nation. How many different tribal names do we still have? Lemko, Boyko, Hutsul, Dolinyan, plus probably a host of others before them lost to history. It is an inherent weakness that must be accounted for. Rather than a villager seeing the greater nation that they are a part of, one sees only their specific tribe, or even better yet, smaller scale to that of a village. It is something that must be changed if we are to further advance our position.

Regional identity will almost always be a detriment to a nation if it lacks a strong national core. It is only after consolidation of a people that regional differences can begin to flourish.

Look no further than Ukraine itself to see an example. To achieve the goal of Greater Ukraine, there were sacrifices that needed to be made. The time of being called a Podolian or Volhynian Ruthenian, has passed. Regional dialects gone with them. Rarely are local ways of speech heard within major towns or in government. This is now reserved to the old and young within remote villages. It is not lost on me; however, the tinge of sorrow that is felt by this circumstance, as if something will be forever faded from history.



Without this standardization and unification, there would be no connected current to which all groups could sail together. Having everyone knowing a common standard, history, and calling themselves one name, is the bedrock of unification. The question of Transcarpathia is not simply a matter of suppressing the rights of the common people but of keeping the idea of a Greater Ukraine alive.

A truth about our predicament is that we also need to put forth an idea and be uncompromising in its goal. This means, in the course of implementation, to not devalue the validity of the regional dialect, culture, or philosophy, but to work towards an alluring positive image of high culture and value. Regrettably, it will lead to a loss of regional culture, that otherwise would be a valuable addition to the Rusyn nation; however, at our current state, I believe taking this route is a necessity for national survival. Once our nation is greater tied together, then our regional differences may begin to shine.

We must also create an environment where high culture can develop. In our words, put our money where our mouth is. At this time we have no capital directed towards this on any large scale. There are neither scholarships nor organizations dedicated to such a thing. This is what one could say is a real downfall of our current movement. At this stage, the Rusyn community is not one that is economically viable, so we must make it so. The work of an

individual that is dedicated to their craft fulltime, and is being paid handsomely for it, will almost always have their output increased in quality and quantity.

What is high culture you might ask? In effect, it is work of lasting intellectual and artistic significance. Novels, music, illustrations - all of these a mere handful of avenues that can be used for the development of high culture. They challenge the bedrock of the human thought and expression that every person craves.

This type of work differentiates high culture from that of folk or popular culture. Folk being a real expression of the human experience and a society's history. This is often taken from the perspective of the less fortunate classes of people. With popular culture being the work aimed at the lowest common denominator and almost always lacking any real emotional substance.

It is through both folk and high culture, that societies bond and take pride in themselves; that their culture has inherent worth, and the memories and glory of their ancestors lives on to the present day. This process is what forms the continuation of a culture and people. We have a strong and endearing folk culture but are lacking in regard to our high culture.

Half of the issue is that right now the general population does not seek out, or speak, their desire for Rusyn high culture, knowing this it is the job of the intelligentsia to grab the people's hand and lead them forward. Our people are smart; however, they have not had their eyes opened to such gifts and have not been taught its benefits.

This was my reason for the creation of the Rusyn Literature Society. An avenue for the creation of high culture, thought, and storytelling. The addition of actual payment for a writer's work raises the economical capital of the Rusyn cultural sphere. It is also the reason that (RLS) is now an LLC. Not everything can or should be a nonprofit. In fact, the goal in my mind is the creation of a sustainable Rusyn media, not backed on older generation donations, but a thriving community that will pay for it.

After going into this cultural experiment, I realized how naive I was at first. It had been taken for granted that the high culture capital was there, but there was no actual release. All I thought it needed was a little incentive and push to get over the hump. I could not have been more wrong.

What I should have known, was that high culture needs to be fostered, it is not inherent to a culture. Perhaps to some it will seem obvious, but it was a crushing blow to my own expectations. This important distinction makes all the difference in how to approach the issue.

Another thing to add to this story, is that we do not make these moves in a vacuum. While one would like to not have to worry about external forces, this is impractical. Just as the Russian and Ukrainian intelligentsia waged cultural war against each other for control of the modern lands of Ukraine, this applies to our situation as well. Though we have the “home field advantage” every day, if we do not capitalize on it, we waste potential.

We can never forget that on the opposite side of us is the Ukrainian cultural elites. Forget about the common man or woman, this is a battle between cultural and policy decision makers. We can see this even as far as Vojvodina, where Ukraine invested into education for the Pannonian Rusyns, bringing these people to Kyiv and other places around the country. Some of these people then return, fully indoctrinated in Ukrainian culture and thought.

The Ukrainian elite had long realized that instead of assimilation under threat, the route of influencing culture and local politics would lead to long term gains, such as mandatory study in Ukrainian, cultural demonization of the Russian language and country, as just a few policies to note.

Ask yourself this, why is Rusyn knowledge of their history in Transcarpathia so horribly poor? Is it due to chance, or because of a system which pushes conformity at the expense of everything else?

I leave you with these questions to answer for yourself. One thing is for certain. The solution of our high culture problem lies within our communal ability to foster the process and give it a platform to shine.



### 3

## QUALITY OVER QUANTITY

The inherent weakness of a Rusyn cultural movement is the lack of individual, economic, and cultural capital it can use. Therefore, leaders should plan their strategy accordingly, prioritizing the quality of propaganda over volume. You might hesitate at the word propaganda, but this term does not have a universally bad connotation. Works such as anti-smoking PSA's are in no way a "damaging or negative" influence on a society; however, they are propaganda, a tool used to lower the percentage of smokers and incidence of lung cancer.

Why should we bar ourselves from using such methods? Note, this is not a call to use falsified information. What we have on our side, is an important distinction from that of the Ukrainians. We are enlightening others of the truth, not feeding

them lies. An easy way to see how this fact is correct, is the methods used by the government of Ukraine.

At every turn, their plan is to conceal and obfuscate the truth of the situation in Transcarpathia and abroad. How is this done? Through suppression of census results, the pressuring of neighboring governments regarding Rusyn communities, and pressure to conform to Ukrainian traditions and standards, by promoting their own high culture and history over ours.

In all regards, our tactics have been the exact opposite. Instead of concealing the truth we hope to bring it out into the light. We have demanded fair census results, reduction of government pressure, and reasonable cultural and political autonomy. As for that last point, it is one that deserves a chapter of its own.

With the right propaganda, minds will move quickly to our position. However, we are aiming for two groups, and should act accordingly. While we should be striving to produce quality folk and high culture for those already on our side, and to strengthen the internal community, first contact is a whole other story.

In this situation, the most effective approach is emotionally effective media. One must first capture their hearts, before influencing their minds. We could shove an entire book of facts and geopolitical realiti-



es in their faces, but this would not necessarily make someone care about our situation. The majority think with their emotions first, not with an analytical thought process.

This tactic of call to emotion is so commonly used, that there is little question of its validity. A recent example being that of the migrant crisis in Europe. Though most migrants were from lands such as Sub-Saharan Africa and Afghanistan, instead of Syria, and had no right to be in Europe; Western European public opinion was not openly hostile to it at first.

Such high public support was heavily influenced by the mainstream media's underhanded approach of appealing to emotion. Most Europeans reading this book, will easily remember the picture of a dead Syrian child on a beach, which was then promptly plastered on the front page of every major news outlet. This proved to be a prime example of manipulating the public's emotions regarding the situation, to justify their inadequate migration policy.

Though many people, before and after, died in attempts to reach Europe, this was somehow viewed as abnormally abhorrent. It is the fact that there was a picture that could convey an emotional response, that no random journalistic article could provide. The use of emotional manipulation in this case was extremely irresponsible and disadvantageous to the

general population. However, it was effective. Such tools can be used to further benefit our cause. Remember, we must work in the area of grey morality, as our enemies do. If we do not, we are handicapping ourselves.

This means, on a greater level, we must put the suffering of the Rusyn people to the forefront, not by exaggerating (most of the time), but by actually telling the stories that we have yet to use. Why do we have such few mainstream-orientated media regarding Wisła (Lemko Ethnocide), or life during communism for Rusyns? A documentary here, a small video there, this is simply not enough. Think about how many documentaries, shows, and media there are about the Armenian Genocide, Holocaust, and the Pontic Greek expulsion from Turkey. We cannot match this level of constant output, but the more well-presented information we have available to the masses, the more people will be reached.

Now to the issue of our movement's weaknesses. What we absolutely do not have, is excessive capital in any respect. With a mountainous territory the size of New Jersey and a population  $\frac{1}{8}$  the size, our resources are drawn thin. Another weakness, that needs to be acknowledged, is the economic reality of Carpathian Rus'. Unlike that of Israel, or similar diaspora countries, we do not have the money or connections to affect policy yet.

Due to this our efforts must be strategic and coordinated. A focus on needed media or work, which does not necessarily mean what someone most wants to do. Weighing a media project for a documentary or on the ground activism work over archiving a list of documents no one will ever read and have no importance as an example.

This also means, instead of letting every promising individual go off on their own pursuit, somehow, they must be enticed to work within a larger network. Though not everyone can be convinced, a high percentage must be brought into the fold. It is well worth noting, to say that a system of national highly structured organizations, that we have now, are currently doing a terrible job with this and must be changed.

We must also be ready to cut losses when needed. Though old age organizational structure and activism worked for the 1990s and early 2000s, their effectiveness has waned. The new generations are neither interested in joining, nor changing, the current system. Over bloated, rigid, and unable to produce meaningful change, societies of old have done little in the last half decade. So why would anyone, who is young, be interested in joining such a place? Many in the younger generations are wanting to make a difference; we must market this as enticing for them.

While the opposition attempts to pump out quality propaganda, we are still trapped in the mindset of hours-long presentations and selling DVDs; an older generation still lost in the past during the time when George W. Bush was president. This mindset shows in the age makeup of organizational leaders.

The phrase, “The average age of CEOs is the average age of a boomer” rings true here. Our current crop of elites has done little to foster the passing of the torch. A smart few work outside the system to select the next generational leaders. In this way, there is a type of meaningful succession. Though you would be hard-pressed to give one example of an organization that is mentoring younger Millennials, and Gen Z to replace them.

This is not even mentioning the pitiful display that is the World Congress of Rusyns. Rather than using it as an opportunity to plan with all other organizations, we instead choose to use this event as a time for drinking and tomfoolery. Can anyone name one meaningful lasting accomplishment this group has made in the last decade? If this event continues the way it currently has been, there is little reason to attend, or give any support.

We must start over once again. New technology, planning, structure, and individuals are the way forward.

## 4

# GATHER INSTITUTIONAL POWER

It is a misconception that protests, and other public demonstrations are the greatest tool for political change. They are, in all actuality, a barometer to the social capital of a movement rather than any display of meaning. In other words, demonstrations only work when you are pushing against a rotting door. This of course, should be separated from revolutionary activities, which are a completely different game to be played.

It is neither the thousand people march, nor the Instagram post in solidarity, that promotes any real difference. In fact, the only meaningful way to promote governmental change, other than revolution, is a quiet, and slow, takeover of the institutions. Being that Zakarpattia is in the bleakest shape, compared

to other Rusyn areas, this is what I will be focusing on.

Beginning in the early 1960s, and onwards, the Post-modern, and other similar leftist movements in America enacted a plan so successful that their results are readily apparent today. They control popular culture, the managerial elites, and are in the early stages of infiltrating one of the major political parties, which already bows down to them in many respects. It can be argued that they were in some ways co-opted by corporate forces, but what was so well thought out about this plan, that caused such a dramatic shift in American culture and policy?

The answer lies within the way they went about gathering power. Instead of large-scale riots or protests, the smart ones instead started to infiltrate the institutions of culture. Even though the Neo-Conservatives still held the vast majority of real political power over the following decades, these people did not aim for that at first. They knew something that the Conservatives, even in the modern day, still fail to grasp. If you control the minds of the youth and the mainstream culture, you control the gateway to power.

Teachers, intellectuals, professors, journalists - all of these professions greatly influence the minds of youth and the cultural sphere. Slowly, over time, individuals infiltrated these professions, and in turn,

promoted their own ideology. Various things such as political correctness, gender theory, and other such ideological thoughts moved to the forefront of the public mind.

These practices lack any real intellectual substance; however, this is not necessarily the point of them. They are, I would argue, tools in themselves for social conformity and control. A combination of guilt pride and dogmatic theocracy. Like many Christian rules and practices from a bygone era, they were used as a covert way to make certain boundaries within society. It is especially obvious with how often they eat their own, one step out of line and to the guillotine for you. Putting aside my own opinion on this ideology and its theories, their cunning and planning are something to be admired, and in some ways replicated.

They are, in fact, simply using older rules with a twist. These stretch back to as long as civilizations have existed, with varying levels of severity and avenues, to use them. In our case, we would be wise to use these same rules to advance our own goals. That is, to further the Rusyn cause, while leaving the rhetoric behind.

What this means is as follows, an infiltration of the intellectual elite, teaching professions, and low-level political positions. Slowly, but surely, begin to push a Rusyn ideological bend within the schools and city

level politics. Implant those that wish to further our cause into University faculty, who would now provide a safety barrier for these teachers and professors, should they run into trouble.

The specific people that would be infiltrating these positions of power must also be carefully selected. An ideal individual for this mission would be someone that already has the ambition to get into these fields, with the talent to pull it off. If they are already Pro-Rusyn, then help fund their campaigns and provide other external support. Those that do not have a clear Pro-Rusyn stance, or even strong Ukrainophile position, we should work to bring them over to our side.

It should also be a priority to occupy roles such as mayor and city council member. These roles are politically viable enough to influence policy in our direction, while operating below a national political radar. If we do infiltrate these institutions and positions of power, come a decade or two down the road, the national government will wonder where all of this “Rusyn-ness” came from. This is not unlike what the conservatives had discovered at the turn of the century.

We must be quiet about these changes, covertly working behind the scenes. On some level, the national government will have some inkling about what is going on, though, in all likelihood, they are



far too busy with Russia and simple difficulties in keeping their country together. It also means not overplaying our hand before we have enough cultural capital. Sudden attention regarding our people and goals, when we do not have all the proper pieces in place, would be disastrous.

To effectively use this strategy, it will take time. It was only in the last 10-15 years (or 50 years since the 1960s), that the Overton window had been successfully shifted enough for Leftist activists and influencers to be able to step out from the shadows of academia and other institutions. Even now, they still have not fully realized their goals.

Because we are starting off at a more advantageous political position than where they were at, the time it takes for us to accomplish this is likely considerably less. A decade is still an incredibly long time for most people though, and it has many opportunities for disaster. If you choose this road, keep your cards close to your chest. The average villager and city person can, and should, promote their Rusyn identity and culture. Those that aim to influence power, need to play the game, when it is required. Express your beliefs, when the opportunity for influence is ripe; however, conceal it when your position is in jeopardy. A good teacher or politician is magnitudes more useful holding a position of power, than becoming a martyr. It is your duty in a role such as these, to not turn into one.



## FAILURE IN 1991

Calling for a referendum for political autonomy in 1991, was, in hindsight, one of the biggest blunders of our recent political history. We had “jumped the gun”, so to speak, skipping all manners of cultural and political capital development. It was asking for something in which we had no power to do anything about if it not honored.

Within Transcarpathia, Rusyns, especially right after the fall of the Soviet Union, had no real political power. Which is to say even today, we have little if any in the region. Due to this, even though the motion was voted in favor, there were no consequences for the government in Kyiv to ignore it. This is a prime example of not understanding one's political position and cashing your chips out too early. Had community leaders, instead, focused on cultural

growth and local institutional power, before attempting to affect the political power, they would have had a much stronger chance of success.

This, of course, does not mean that Ukraine would have accepted the results of such a vote. There is a strong possibility they would have denied it anyway. However, we could have further used this to our advantage in numerous ways.

What could be described as the main reason for the failure of the vote, is the fact that we could not have made it hard for them to reject it. In a way, Rusyns, in Transcarpathia, had been bluffing the central government. How could we have made life hell for them if they denied us this autonomy? Mass unrest? Western media coverage? Threat of secession? Not one of these was even in the realm of possibility.

In the end, we received a "Well, we tried, but the authoritarian government in Kyiv didn't honor our wishes." I do not blame the Ukrainian government for the way they acted because this would have gone against their own interests. A goal of any centralized government is to maintain or gain institutional power. The loss of power to regional politics is an inherently negative outcome for high level politicians, and for the centralized state. Due to this, there must be some type of "power" to force the government's hand. Whether it be through the carrot or the stick, there must be at least one. This is not a unique

aspect to our situation with the Ukrainian government either. Rusyns were recognized in Slovakia using the “carrot” method. Before the possibility of joining the EU, Slovakia had little desire to recognize or help its Rusyn minority.

Magically (not), when a requirement for Slovakia to join the union was decent treatment and recognition of their minorities, they suddenly changed their tune. In the case of Ukraine, a combination of the two would have been needed. Shake with your right hand but keep a rock in your left, as they say. Make it worth their time to recognize us, while also knowing things will go very poorly if they do not.

If you think this is an extremist position, look at how governments interact with one another. Take the period of the Cold War, as a prime example. The United States would essentially pay countries to be on their side. This would be through infrastructure projects, trade deals, weapons to counter revolutionaries, and even payments to dictators so they could stay in power.

All of this is great, but do not forget what would happen if these countries did not bow down to what the US wanted. Methods such as the funding of terrorists, coups, economic strangulation, all used by intelligence agencies and the central government. In the 1960s, alone, the United States had funded regime changes in the Congo, Laos, Dominican

Republic, Brazil, Iraq, Chile, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Cambodia.

The truth is, that a government will not do something that negatively affects them out of the goodness of their heart. We can all wish for this to not be the case, but the game of geopolitics is not one for altruism and positive thinking. There is no place for morals here.

At this point, it is hard to say how likely another referendum will be. With the increasing nationalism of the central government, it is hard to believe this will happen anytime soon. Things would have been much easier had we gotten our act together between 1990 and 2012. Alas, only time will tell. For now, we should increase our focus on collecting regional political power, in the chance that the opportunity does come around again.

## 6

### OUR RUSSOPHILE PAST

If one looks back into the history of the Rusyn cultural movement, its Russophile orientation is undeniable. This is an odd contrast compared to the rest of the East Slavic realm at the time of the early 1900s. While Belarusians and Ukrainians were starting to come into their own, the furthest group away from the Russian empire was creeping ever closer to it.

Its influence touches every part of the story. The great Alexander Dukhnovych had even created his own Russian/Rusyn hybrid script to write his works in. Using it in the famous *I was, am, will remain Rusyn*, published in 1851. Arguably the most famous Rusyn martyr ever, Maxim Sandovych, was also a hardcore Russophile at heart. These are just two examples of the many influential Rusyns who

had a deep-seated love for the Russian state.

Instead of taking inspiration from Ukrainophiles, intellectuals saw Russia as the one to be placed up on the pedestal. Some may look back at this with contempt; however, this was the best of the worst choices that Rusyns had. The fact that they had been Russophile-orientated, is one of the primary reasons that our identity even exists today. With such a weak national spirit for the time, as well as factors surrounding the area, it was essential to pick a side. Had we not done so, local and regional identities would have been too weak to withstand national movements.

Historically, the modern Russophile movement among Rusyns began after the 1848 revolution in Hungary. These villagers had witnessed the Russian army march through the Carpathians on their way to Budapest to crush the rebellion of the Hungarians; the enormous importance to this event cannot be understated. Along with the Spring of Nations, occurring the very same year, and the atmosphere produced by it, these two events are the starting point of the modern Rusyn identity movement. Whatever one's views on this topic are, there is no healthy way to deny Russophilia as a pillar of early Rusyn development.

Had we not chosen the Russophile direction, the next century might have turned out rather badly for



Rusyns. We must look at the surrounding political atmosphere of the era to understand what I mean. Following 1848, you see increased Hungarian, Slovak, and Ukrainian nationalism, all in a way seeking cultural, and sometimes political, autonomy from their imperial rulers. This only became a real and serious threat against the Rusyns following the 1867 formation of Austria-Hungary, though the building blocks had begun twenty years earlier.

Because of the weakness of Rusyn identity, all three of the movements were in a fantastic position to attempt to assimilate communities in Carpathian Rus'; in some cases, these movements even had substantial success. The amount of former Rusyn villages in Eastern Slovakia that have been assimilated is a staggering amount, same with the communities in north-eastern Hungary. In the modern day there are very few left. The most important thread in this entire situation however, is the counterbalance of the Galician Ukrainian movement.

During the late 1800s, and in the beginning of twentieth century, the Russophile movement in Eastern Galicia had been all but forgotten, in comparison to the Austrian-backed Pro-Ukrainian faction. The times of the Russophile movement in the 1850s and 1860s of Adolf Dobriansky and the Ruthenian Council was long gone. This provided an issue for both the Russians and Rusyns. For the Russian higher classes, many had seen the writing on the wall.

Whether these people in Ruthenia were to be called “Little Russians” or Ukrainians, it had become clear that this group was different from those in the Muscovite homeland. This provided a geopolitical issue that persists, to a lesser extent, into the present day. Though Stalin's industrialization of Urals, and other areas such as the Volga, in the following decades made land and food production from Ukraine less important, this did not completely eliminate the problem. The possibility of a pro-western nation bordering Russia to the south-west, combined with the loss of a perceived part of their ethnic homeland remains all too close for comfort.

As for Rusyns, the winning out of the Pro-Ukrainian identity is a grave challenge. From almost day one, this movement claims all of Carpathian Rus' as part of its nation, along with this, it wishes to combine all East Slavic speaking areas of Austria-Hungary into one administrative unit.

If such an action as this would have happened, the result most likely would have been considerably worse for a Rusyn identity than how things actually turned out. Outnumbered and outclassed in terms of cultural capital and population size, a Rusyn awakening would have been incredibly outmatched in such an environment.

It is because of the Russophile orientation in Carpathian Rus', not in spite of it, that Rusyns maintain

their position towards Ukrainization. A purely Rusyn orientation is simply not strong enough to combat a Ukrainian one, at the time. This also brings in, even if it was minimal, support from the then Russian empire to bankroll further cultural development, of which was desperately needed. It is for these two reasons alone, that a Pro-Russophile orientation was a stronger strategic choice than a simple Rusyn one. What we do now; however, is a completely different story.

Looking back, we can see how untrustworthy Russia truly is. At every step of the way, we were put on the chopping block. It was under the rule of the USSR, and with that primarily the actions of Russian decision makers, that led to the worst repression of Rusyns that we have ever seen in our history.

We can again see this with the foolish declaration of independence of Transcarpathia from Ukraine in the mid-2000s. A move almost certainly backed by Russian support. The provocative announcement seems little more than a “Screw you” message to Ukraine from Moscow, rather than anything to do with helping Rusyns.

The Russians may one day prove to be a useful, yet still untrustworthy ally if the geopolitics of the region change. Should the state of Ukraine weaken, or a larger confrontation happen within the far east of the country, we should not be so quick to dismiss a

strategic partner; however, should nothing change, our best option is to work out a suitable arrangement with the Ukrainians. In this scenario, independence is a fantasy; regional autonomy to that of Crimea before annexation is a favorable result.

This scenario is both the most peaceful, and strategically sound, for the long-term future of Carpathian Rus'. Having an entire nation pitted against you is never an optimal thing, even if we gain independence from it; however, sometimes it is unavoidable. Should the US pull completely back from Europe, or more importantly the EU collapses or shrinks, all bets are off.

Though the European Union, and US, strokes the flames of ultra-nationalism in Ukraine, it also keeps these forces in check to some extent. If we do see a Western retreat from Eastern Europe, then we can be sure of two things: The first is an incredible increase of Russian influence into many of the former eastern bloc countries, and the second is the escalation of Ukrainian nationalism, following tensions with Russia.

Under these conditions, increased mistreatment of Rusyns is a likely outcome. In this instance, we may need to seek a different path; however, this outcome, within the next decade, is unlikely. One can also not forget the benefit of being separated from Russia, by

a country such as Ukraine as well. Such a buffer provides a barrier from Russian influence, which in an era where Rusyns are trying to fully coalesce their identity and history, is a good thing. For now at least, trying to reason with an increasingly nationalist government in Kyiv, is the soundest idea.



## POLITICAL REALITY OF CARPATHIAN RUS'

The geopolitical and political position of Carpathian Rus' puts us at inherent odds against the western world. An existing nation such as Ukraine, will almost always become a battleground between two great European powers, the EU (Germany) and Russia. It happened in 1914, 1939, and now again today.

Without Ukraine being in the cultural or political sphere of Russia, Russia becomes geopolitically, a distant North-Eastern country on the fringes of Europe. It also loses an important agriculture, and industrial zone with port access on the Black Sea. With it, Ukraine provides a physical buffer by the sheer size of the territory, with the Carpathians protecting the southwest, along with the benefit of being next to the literal heartland of Europe.

Do not also discount the desire of the Russian people to stay as a superpower. This idea of great prominence in world affairs, goes back to the early formations of the Russian people. For them, Ukraine is not only strategically important, but also ideologically.

As for the EU, this is both a geopolitical, as well as philosophical one. A primary goal of the European Union and NATO, since its inception, is to limit Russian influence with Europe, while also providing peace between its member countries. These efforts, on some level, had been going on long before the European Union, and they are an essential point in understanding the geopolitics of this region.

There has always been a double standard, in which the West judges their own countries, versus Russia. When Pan-Anglo and Pan-Germanism were rising in the 19th century, Pan-Slavism was seen as a corrupting and subversive force. As if Russians were playing behind the scenes to fracture European multiethnic empires. Sound familiar? It should. In all reality, none of these ways of thinking were better or worse than each other.

This progressing to the time of the Soviet Union. Even though NATO has nuclear missiles in Turkey, only hundreds of miles away from Russia, a countermeasure by putting their own in Cuba, was seen as aggressive and a provocation.



Even now, this shows up in the present with NATO and the European Union, slowly, but surely, getting closer to Russia's doorstep. Of course, it was only a verbal agreement to not move an inch closer to Moscow after the fall of USSR, but it was still said. The hypocrisy of all these things, is readily apparent to those that take off their rose-colored glasses.

Western Europe does what is strategically beneficial for them, not what is the most morally virtuous, as they like to claim. I will not fault them for this; every other nation works this way, but their word has as much weight as smoke from a fire. What they preach is often not how they behave. Remember this when dealing with them.

Where does this leave Rusyns in all of this? It is the fact of our existence, which threatens to change what it means to be Ukrainian, as well as to destabilize the larger state. Even if we do not see ourselves, how this could be the case; this is what the central government believes. This, along with our perceived and sometimes accurately noted, Russophile tendencies by western nations, puts us in direct geopolitical opposition against them.

If we receive political autonomy within Ukraine this may be seen as a strategic success for Russia by Western Europe. Even if we know that this is mostly nonsense from a Rusyn perspective. This problem was already known back before WWI as well. It is

not a new phenomenon.

Worried by the influence that Russia would have over its regions, both Austria-Hungary, as well as the first Polish Republic, sought to stifle Rusyn national movements in Carpathian Rus', instead promoting Ukrainophiles. For the most part, this did work. The Russophile movement has been effectively eradicated in Galicia, though, in Carpathian Rus', this of course, was less successful. The actions during WWI, such as the Thalerhof concentration camp, hurt the Russophile and Rusynophile movements within Lemkovyna. Almost all major activists and intelligentsia were imprisoned, either deeply scarred, or killed.

This is one of the main reasons, among many others, why the amount of Ukrainophiles is so much more substantial among Lemko Rusyns, than that of Subcarpathia. Because of this perception of being a threat or geopolitical wildcard. there is little reason for Rusyns to be backed by any Western country.

This essentially closes the door to us, for any type of Western influence to pressure Ukraine. One could say that the EU may choose to try to "buy" our loyalty instead, otherwise known as investing millions of dollars into the region. A plan such as this, however, is both more expensive and trickier politically, than simply maintaining the current status quo. We could get away with being recognized in Slovakia

and Poland, because, geopolitically, the states, and our influence in them, are much less important than Ukraine. Even then, we benefited enormously from larger minorities pushing for recognition and autonomy. It would have been much harder to achieve our current status without the Hungarians or Silesians. For now and possibly ever, our goals do not align with those to the west of us.



## THE LEMKO, BOYKO, AND HUTSUL QUESTION

The question of what is a Rusyn, is still a complicated one to answer. It is one of the greatest issues that we face, and a lingering problem to others regarding our legitimacy. No Rusyn questions the validity of those in Prešov or Western Transcarpathia. Now, even the Ukrainians have given up on their attempts to Ukrainophile the Rusyns in Slovakia. Three main questions still persist -- that of the Lemkos, Boykos, and Hutsuls.

Regarding Lemkos, this is perhaps the easiest of the three. They are an ethnic subgroup most intricately connected with Rusyns in the Prešov region. Combined with their verifiable ancestry from those on the southern slopes, this is a non-question in all reality. Lemkovyna is a part of Carpathian Rus'.

Why, you may ask, are there so many Ukrainophiles then? In short, it has much to do with two separate things. First, is the mass movement of Lemkos to Eastern Galicia after WWII. This act would forever complicate things politically for those back in Lemkovyna.

Due to this, we have generations of Ukrainians with Lemko ancestry, who the government can point to, and say, "What are you talking about?" The second, being the eradication of most pro-Rusyn activists and organizations during WWI, such as Thalerhof, public executions (like Sandovych's case), and other repressive techniques.

The problem of Ukrainophile Lemkos is a long lasting one. It will not just be the current generation that we must deal with, but their descendants too. For however long a population of these people exists within Ukraine, there will be a political and cultural battle over this group. The question from all this becomes, do we have the resources and willpower to fight this battle till the very end?

Lemko-Rusyns are, in many ways, one of the least important questions regarding Rusyns, even if they are part of us. Though there are high quality organizations such as Lem.fm, the cold truth is that, politically and culturally, they lack any real significance since Operation Wisła.

Lemkovyna, as a political entity is dead, with little hope of ever returning. Of course, the area may flourish again one day; however, where we should divert resources, is not here. Instead, it would be wise to focus on the two areas that have the most political potential. These two areas being Transcarpathia and Prešov.

As for the Boyko question, it is one that seems to have been born out of belief of necessity, rather than reality. The majority of the Boyko homeland resides within Eastern Galicia, with many Rusyn scholars only claiming a small part within Western Galicia. It has also been my experience, that I have met very few Boykos at all, not to mention ones that have been Pro-Rusyn-orientated. They seem to have been assimilated at a much greater level than that of the Lemkos.

I believe we should discard the thought of Boykos<sup>1</sup> as Rusyn. They provide way too many negatives than what we get for including them. First, the land of the Boykos is politically nonexistent, and a non-entity. Much like the Lemkos, they are now spread out among many different areas in Ukraine, while also being somehow even more Ukrainian-orientated. Dropping them from the official definition of Rusyns, would also give propagandists one less avenue to attack us by using Boyko Ukrainophiles.

I cannot think of one positive to include them besides-

es a handful of Pro-Rusyn people, who are not even at all notable within the intelligentsia or activism realm. If we discarded this notion, and woke up tomorrow, our situation would only be better, not worse. This theory of Boyko inclusion, in short, is a waste of time.

The Hutsul question is more complicated than the first two. This is primarily due to the foggy identity of the group. It reaches all the way down from Northern Romania to Ivano Frankivsk, in Eastern Galicia. Those in Romania, while still divided ideologically, have a sizable Pro-Rusyn population, even having a Rusyn party (Uniunea Culturală a Rutenilor din România) with a member in the Chamber of Deputies. Oppositely, those in the northern slopes are heavily Ukrainophile. The real question, at the moment, lies within those that live in Transcarpathia.

Though there is a considerable amount who do consider themselves Rusyn, they seem overall to be more Ukrainian orientated. This is a fight that may well be worth winning. If we can succeed in changing the attitude of these Hutsuls, to becoming overwhelmingly Pro-Rusyn, it will help create a more united Rusyn Transcarpathia. From a purely political perspective, this would be beneficial. It also opens up the door to Pro-Rusyn tendencies of Hutsuls from within Ivano-Frankivsk.



As such a small ethnic group, every chance for further political and cultural power must be taken; not in a quest for imperial expansion, or for the sake of dominance, but because we are inherently less safe than dominant ethnic groups.

We are still, in large part, at the mercy of the Ukrainians. Their behavior in the past towards Poles, has shown they cannot be trusted to not use genocide, ethnic cleansing, or other extreme means for their own benefit. From a historical and linguistic perspective, they are considerably further away than that of the Lemkos. I would argue that this does not tell the full story. As a counter example, we can look to the Pannonian Rusyns.

This group is essentially what a linguist could describe as “Rusynophile Slovaks”. They speak a Western Slavic language, and have lived within Serbia and Croatia for a few hundred years, with their main connection to other Rusyns being that of Greek Catholic faith.

Despite all of this, they still consider themselves as one of us. In this regard, Hutsuls are not even the most “far out” groups of Rusyns that there is. While there are others who could better describe the connection between Hutsuls and the rest of the Rusyns, there are strategic benefits to including them, which do not damage our current foundation of who is a Rusyn.

**1** - The author would change their position over the following years regarding this topic and begin to follow a significantly more inclusive approach to Rusyn development.

## RUSYN, A HOUSE LANGUAGE

The issue with the Rusyn language is not its merit, but its status. It is seen as a thing that should be kept within the home or village, not something that can be used for literary work or in the mainstream.

Anyone who has been paying close attention to the situation, already knows this. While young people use Rusyn within their family or close friends, it rarely is used on the web or past the lines of their town. Of course, some things should not necessarily be changed. It is not a demeaning, nor detrimental situation if a Rusyn talks to a Slovak from Bratislava in Slovak. This is the lingua franca of the country after all. It would be rather delusional to not be able to interact in the nation's primary language. Devaluation of the Rusyn language among Rusyns however, is most troubling.

The reality we face today is that many young people within Transcarpathia and Slovakia, do not know, or speak in Rusyn as well as their parents and grandparents. Increasingly, the Ukrainian language has begun to dominate even the Rusyn population within Transcarpathia.

One can peg this on an increased effort of teaching Ukrainian, bad perceptions of the accents from within Transcarpathia by the rest of the country, and a host of other important issues. I will ignore all of these. Each and every one of them are of secondary importance to our predicament. They may have put us into this position but fixing them is not the way we get out of this. It is our own failures which continue to put the language into a downward spiral. Take the issue of the lack of codification as an example. We have had 30 years to solve this problem, but we still, to this day, cannot get anything done. As if, somehow, each dialect is so important we must forgo any sense of conformity.

If we took five writers from Poland, Slovakia, and Ukraine; most likely each of them would use a different standard to write in. In theory, most of these writers would be able to understand what the others had written, though with minor problems. How is this conducive to unifying a culture and language? We cannot, even as a people, agree on a standard so that everyone, everywhere, can clearly understand what is written. How will we be able to solve more

important issues? The Rusyn language is not linguistically, nor historically, special. It is special to us, because it is our heritage, and voice of our ancestors, but nothing about po-nashomu is intrinsically more noteworthy than Ukrainian or Russian.

Italy has 34 native languages and, God only knows, how many dialects, but somehow they were able to come up with a standard that everyone could use. This was important to them for one main reason: the unification, and consolidation, of the Italian state. Even though other languages, standards, and dialects are used within certain areas, the Italian language is now inseparable from the people, and the nation; a place in which regionalism is, in some ways, even greater than in our situation.

It is simply not about unification but avoiding current separation, too. Even today, most Lemko-Rusyns refer to their dialect as just "Lemko", as if this constitutes a completely different language. Just 150 years ago, they called themselves Rusnaks just like the rest of us. Slowly, but surely, they have slipped away from other Rusyns in many aspects.

What should be done about this? In a perfect world, we would gather the top linguists from each group, throw them into a conference room, and lock the door until they have a codified solution. Moving past hyperbole, a meeting of all these individuals is a must. Having the best professionals in a room, to

solve an issue of this importance seems to me, to be the best solution.

An even greater issue regarding the Rusyn language, is how we market it. Learn some words to speak to your baba next time you see them, know how to ask for a drink when you visit some villages, all these valid, yet not enough to persuade someone to be fluent or write in it. These goals only provide a reason for a shallow understanding of the language, never cutting beneath the surface.

Here again, we have the crossroads of high culture and language. Instead of only promoting the above-mentioned reasons, we should put forward the benefit of reading Rusyn literary works, and then creating one's own. This has multiple benefits. The first being that of an increased knowledge of the history of our people, which, if we are talking honestly, is incredibly poor for most of us.

The second benefit is helping improve the perception of the language. Our language can produce long lasting works of art; it has done before. Po-nashomu is not simply a bastardized dialect, originating from a poor mountain community, but that of a culture worthy of saving.

A last problem remains to be discussed. It is of the avenues of learning our language. Besides buying a book, watching some videos online, or asking one's

parents, there are few potential ways to learn the language. This situation presents major issues, the ease of access to learn the language, and that of the influence of this problem on the language's perception.

Without high or even any mid-level institutions, a language's perception will be negatively influenced. While the marketing of a language is important, it is but the entry-level step. Opening not just elementary schools in Rusyn, but high schools, and, at the minimum, lower-level undergraduate institutions (gymnasiums, technical colleges, etc.) should be a priority.

Having the ability for an individual to go through their entire academic career with the primary language being Rusyn, is invaluable. It proves the usefulness of the language, as well as providing intimate knowledge of Rusyn history through an academic setting. With all these systems in place, the potential application of the Rusyn language will increase, along with the added benefit of fostering an environment for academic and fictional works.

We have fallen behind the curve and let the status of our language slip. Not all is bad; what we have lost, or have never had before, can be gained. It requires decisive, and unwavering, action; something that our community is not known for.





## REMOVE THE EYE CANDY

A position supporting Rusyn identity will make many nationalist Ukrainians outraged, no matter what window dressing is used. The uneasy fact is that these people are our opponents, not misguided friends. This is not a debate about economic or civic policy, but if we exist separately from Ukrainians.

You can neither attempt to placate, nor compromise, with these people. Anything less than full recognition of the Rusyn nation, as well as a minimum level of political autonomy, would be a complete failure of our goal. The simple fact is that we do not need to work with them to further our goals. Within the Ukrainian geopolitics, there are two main groups that need to be worked with and influenced.

The first is local Transcarpathian political support,

and the second being the national government in Kyiv. If these two things are met, then the support of the masses within Galicia, or central Ukraine, are not needed. In borderline authoritarian states such as this, the wishes of the masses fall on deaf ears to the federal government unless the people are supported by outside forces (such as the Euromaidan). Should they eventually take some necessary steps toward recognizing Rusyns and providing autonomy, the working population will begrudgingly follow.

What must always be remembered, is that we are a majority-minority. Within our historical homeland, we are overwhelmingly the dominant, ethnic group. This gives us several advantages that other non-majority-minorities do not have. Chief among them, is the threat of political autonomy. What we can hold over their heads, is an entire region that is wary and culturally hostile towards the state.

For a nation, such as Ukraine, this would be a complete disaster. Though the federal government has much more power to do as it pleases, than other states to its west, it also is faced with the problem of a weak unity between each of the nation's different parts. The cultural and political differences, between east and west, have been a major problem since the country's independence after the fall of the USSR.

The problem involves a Galician dominated west,

that is almost entirely Ukrainian language using and pro EU, with a more Russophile orientated east. The issue with this is that there are essentially two political states within Ukraine today, both with different desires and goals, neither likely to be happy at the same time. This means that the number one goal of the state is keeping the country together; any threat to the unity of Ukraine must be taken as an existential risk. While this could backfire on us, if we screw up, it is also a bargaining chip, if used right.

All of this is to say, that attempting to reaffirm your commitment to a prosperous Ukraine to those that disagree, or even find you hostile, is a strategic mistake most of the time.

The goal of one's activism work should make people uncomfortable and have to think. If someone instead chooses to either countersignal or try and qualify themselves as "not a threat" to those that disagree, their message is muddled and forgotten. Do not attempt to stop their vitriolic hate or accusations, for they will continue to be upset, no matter how much jargon you include.

Instead, show the truth to destroy false allegations and let the anger blow over (easier said than done). If you become so focused on having a positive impression among Ukrainians, then you lose sight of your ambitions. Had the Bolsheviks been so concerned of how they were perceived by the Russian

government would they have been able to succeed with their goals? If civil rights activists had tried to not offend anyone during the 1960s they would have made zero progress.

This is not the same as having no regard for your self-image, which one should be always aware of, but, as Peter Hitchens often says, I have found that when someone is angry with me because of what I have written, then I am usually on to something. Vitriol and slander, towards the speaker, simply come with the territory of making political and social change. There is not one person in history who achieved something revolutionary that was not, at one point, hated, mocked, and slandered.

For some, there was not even a revelation about their work during their lifetime. Only in death, they were acknowledged for their work in life. If you choose to go down this road, then you must be ready for what comes with it.

In the end, whose opinion really matters? One person's patriot is another person's separatist. It is the opinion of your own nation that matters the most because these are the only people who will reap the rewards of your work and continue the legacy that you started. We must value the opinions and ideals of our own community over all others.

I do not know all of what lies on the road ahead. Suc-

cess and prosperity for our people is far from guaranteed. However, the responsibility for the future of the Rusyn nation lives within every one of us. If we do not try, then there is no hope at all.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Starik Pollock is a Rusyn writer and businessman. He is the founder of the Society For Rusyn Evolution and its current managing director. His published works are focused on the topics of free speech and contemporary Rusyn nationalism.