BABES-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY

CLUJ-NAPOCA

FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY

DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND SECURITY STUDIES

CURRENT ETHNIC ISSUES IN WESTERN UKRAINE

CASE STUDY: RUSYN MINORITY IN THE CARPATHIAN REGION. A PERANNE THEME OR A GEOPOLITICAL STAKE?

SUMMARY OF THE PHD THESIS

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2019

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SUMMARY

Keywords: ethnicity, nation, nationalism, Rusyns, Carpathian region, Central Eastern European region, European integration, national minority, European Union, Russian Federation, imagined communities, Transcarpathia.

Ethnicity as well as the ethnic belonging in the European space, is a complicated theme even in the XXI century, a topic that cannot be analyzed only from one point of view, taking into consideration the multitude of actors, both governmental and non-governmental, engaged in such a theme. In case that the term ethnicity suffers any changes, evolving towards the idea of national identity, the analysis of ethnicity becomes even more complex.

The modern state came in the vast majority of the cases with a package, the development of a political and social system center – periphery. Such a system implemented in Central and Eastern Europe, influenced later also by the national-communist ideology, cemented the idea that a nation has to correspond to a particular ethnic group, or to a ethnic group which forms the majority in a society, which would then tolerate other ethnic groups or subgroups.

The Nation, as a term, was defined for the first time by the French thinker, Ernest Renan in 1882, in a speech named *Qe-est que ctest la nation*?. After the first part of his discourse, in which he defines the better or worse characteristics of a nation, Renan draws some general lines, which are considered to be the basis of the modern definition of the concept of nation. To sum up, Renan underlines the fact that a man is not the slave of race, religion or geography. In his opinion a nation is built by a big number of people with a sane mind and a moral conscience.

Different definition and theories related to ethnicity and nationalism have been developed in time. We tried to follow the constructivist line, due to the fact that we consider this theory to be the most feasible in the process of analyzing of the ethnical and nationality/nation topic in the European region. The main starting point from which we begun in the analysis of nationalism and ethnicity, from a constructivist perspective, consisted in the fact that these two concepts are conceived and interpreted by intellectual elites.

Constructivist thinkers consider that nation, as a concept, is a relatively new concept, which appeared in the period of the Industrial Revolution. Ethnical identity existed for a longer time, being manifested on a local or regional scale, becoming a mass manifestation due to the development of the press (Guttenberg).

There are between 189 and 196 countries in the world today, depending on how we analyze the situation and the political statute of certain territories like Kosovo, Palestine, Western Sahara, Greenland or Taiwan. Strictly from a national point of view, in what concerns the state as political actors, the number of these actors does not seems to be very high. But there is another factor that intervenes in this equation, the ethnical factor. This makes the scene of the international politics even more complicated. The limits of ethnical actors, as number of political actors, are way bigger then in the case of nations. The number of ethnic groups differ, from 650 to several thousands, depending on the theories that we take into consideration. If we would like to limit ourselves only to analyzing Europe, we would find out that the total number of the individuals belonging to a national minority is not small at all. There are about 105 million people that live in Europe and are part of a national minority, out of a total of 770 million Europeans. In percent's that means 14%. There are 337 ethnic groups in Europe out of which only 33 form the majority of the population in a European state. More then 300 groups are part of a minority in different European countries.

Ethnicity became again a main stream topic in the political discourses, taking into consideration the development of the violent rudimentary nationalism that exists on the scene of the international relations. Th case of the ethnical or racial nationalism is more and more developed, according to which a nation is defined by its common patrimony which consists of a language, ethnic origin, as well as religion. These aspects have to be common in order to be able to develop a ethnical and racial homogeneity.

The Revolutions that took place in 1989 in Central Easter Europe, were a shifting point in the development of this region. The importance of these movements, which redesigned the geopolitical map of the European continent, cannot be yet fully assimilated, due to the fact that other revolutionary movements, like the French Revolution for example, still awake intense polemics even after 200 years since their termination.

The importance of these political movements was important not only from a political point of view but also from a cultural and civilizational point of view. Ethnic or religious groups which

have been deprived of their rights during the Soviet era, were able to reinvent themselves in the nineties, as a result of the opening of the new regimes.

The Rusyn identity revival in Central Eastern Europe started before the fall of The Iron Curtain in certain socialist states, but experienced a consistent development only in the nineties.

The Rusyn communities were able to set up after 1989 civic or cultural organizations, which represented the main engine of political and social reconstruction of the Rusyn emancipation movement. Another important aspect was the possibility to communicate between the different communities based in different countries, separated until 1989 by hard borders. The good communication and collaboration between these communities found on the territory of more states made the Rusyn issue more present and publicized in all of the post-communist countries. The local Rusyn communities were able through these kind of PR maneuvers, combined with serious political steps, the local or national communities, were able in the most of the cases to obtain political and social rights of which they have not benefited in the communist era.

In what concerns the structure of the thesis, we had to start from certain hypotheses, which would form the base of our thesis, from which we were able to start the building of out paper. The hypotheses of the paper were separated into two categories, the central hypothesis and a series of secondary hypotheses. The central Hypothesis refers to the possibility of a rupture of Ukraine from Central Europe, by sustaining of the idea of rusynism in the area of Transcarpathia, doubling the process of rupture which is taking place in the eastern part of Ukraine. The rupture that we have in mind is to be perceived in a more symbolical way, political, not strictly territorial.

The secondary hypotheses refer to possible political scenarios which are in close connection to the central hypothesis, but which are able to develop independently from the central hypothesis. The first hypothesis refers to the possible development of new entities in Central Eastern Europe. The second hypothesis analyzes the possibility that a national or ethnic movement which had the possibility to develop in a certain country, in certain political and social conditions, will be able to be replicated inside of another country, which has its own political, social and economical particularities. The third secondary thesis, refers to the possibility of development of certain ethno-national movements not only on a local level but also on a trans-national level.

Within the pale of the research we have used the methodology specific to the domain of social sciences. We tried to analyze mainly the existing bibliography, from a qualitative and quantitative point of view. We also used the comparative method as well as the case study.

The introductory chapter, ***The main currents of thought in what concerns the problematics of nationalism and ethnicity,*** was built in such a matter, to constitute the theoretical basis of our thesis. The theoretical concepts used most often during the thesis, like identity, national identity, ethnicity, the nation-ethnicity relation, or the modernity-ethnicity relation, were defined and detailed during the first subchapter of the first chapter. This chapter was divided in four subchapters. In the first subchapter we tried to define the main theoretical concepts within whose limits we tried to fit ourselves during the hole thesis, focusing ourselves mainly on the constructivist theory, which is dominant in our study. In the second subchapter we have analyzed the main notion which is in a close relation with the notion of ethnicity, to be able to analyze later the particularities of the Rusyn minority. The third subchapter of the first chapter was booked for the analyzing of Central Eastern Europe from the perspective of a scholar who was born and raised in this part of the world, Ernest Gellner. During the third subchapter we also analyzed the problematic of identity trough the filter of imagined communities, concretely the Rusyn community. The last subchapter was allocated to the Ukrainian space in general, out of the desire to present succinctly the complexity of the Ukrainian multiethnic space, as well as the problematic of ethnicity in Ukraine in particular.

The second chapter, ***Historic and identity construction and reconstruction of the Rusyn sphere as well as of the Rusyn regional/national identity***, was constructed as a short historical presentation of the Carpathia area, interpreted mainly from a filo – Rusyn perspective. The main representative of the Rusyn emancipation movement is considered to be Paul Robert Magocsi, professor at the Toronto University -Ukrainian Studies. From the beginning we have established that we are not supporters of the Rusyn movement, but we consider that is very important to analyze the complex theory of rusynism developed by the Rusyn elites. For a better understanding of the filo-rusynism, it is of utmost importance for the reader to be familiar with the main aspects through which the Rusyn thinkers are tring to built the Rusyn identity, different from the Ukrainian culture. For the last three decades, the Rusyn culture tried to differentiate itself from the Ukrainian culture in Transcarpathia. In such a heterogenous area as East Central Europe, both ethnically and

religiously, the interpretation of certain facts or relevant moments in the history of the area are very important. A subjective interpretation of history can create ruptures between different communities, or it can bring closer other communities. In our case, the historical interpretation from a Rusyn perspective has an utmost importance in the process of drawing, and imagining of the history and national identity of Rusyns, by the Rusyn elite. At the end of the second chapter, we were able to conclude that the Rusyn movement can be considered a national movement from in the sense of an ethnic-identity movement, which in case of a relevant demographic evolution, will be able to become an important transnational actor in the Carpathian basin.

The third chapter, ***Current geopolitical projects and visions. The historical continuity of some plans to organize the Eurasian space in general and Central Eastern Europe in particular,*** was developed in order to present a different perspective then the Euro-Atlantic one for the already named area. Taking into consideration that Transcarpathia is a part of Ukraine, and Ukraine from an Eurasian perspective is a part of Eurasia, we considered that is very important to analyze at least marginally the view of the Russian school of thinking about the Central Eastern European area in general and Ukraine in particular. In different cases, for the last 30 years, the Russian Federation have acted on the scene of international politics in such a manner, which would benefit Russia, and keep several countries in its area of influence, as they were part of the former Soviet Union. We have analyzed selectively and in a parsimonious way some of these situations that occurred on the international scene, thinking that we could interpret the steps that will be undertaken by Russian Federation in relation to Ukraine, and how will this affect the evolution or involution of the Rusyn emancipation movement in Transcarpathia. We have not neglected the interest shown by Hungary for Transcarpathia, taking into consideration that in this area a big community of around 150 000 ethnic Magyars live in Transcarpathia. We have tried to follow and demonstrate that there is a link between the behavior of certain politic groups from Hungary and Russia in regards to the Transcarpathian region, involving the ethnic groups that live here.

During this Chapter we have analyzed the so called "passpotization" method of a certain region. This method was first implemented by the Russian Federation in the international sphere. We tried to underline that offering Romanian citizenship to a number of people, that are not being part of today's Romania is beneficial, but in the same time can also be extremely dangerous. Our main objection towards this procedure, is that even if a movement like this can be justified from a

historical and moral point of view, it also legitimizes partially procedures undertaken by states that use this method of offering citizenship to a big group of people which are based outside of the national borders of that country. These kinds of actions have a political role, or a geopolitical one, not the role to straighten out a historical injustice.

As a conclusion, at the end of this chapter we have deduced, that the European path, or the Eurasian path of Ukraine might work as hindrance or as a trampoline for the Russian Eurasian ideology, depending on path that will be undertaken by Ukraine. In case of an European path, the Rusyn minority will have the possibility to evolve to the statute of a transnational minority.

The last chapter, *Ukraine between two ideologies. Ukraine's and the Carpathian region's stand between two competing political-economical blocks*, was built in order to present the bilateral relations between Ukraine and the neighboring countries, respectively the political and economic options that Ukraine, a country tormented by a civil war, has for a shorter or longer period. In this chapter we tried to underline the benefits of the relations between Ukraine and the Visegrad group countries, as well as the benefits o a good bilateral relation between Romania and Ukraine. The economic factor had a vast importance in this analysis. We tried to highlight the benefits of a European path of Ukraine for the Rusyn minority, which in case of a Western orientation of Ukraine, could benefit from a closer collaboration among the countries found in the Carpathian area. This would be beneficial for the Rusyn minority in a global way. In case of a European path chosen by Ukraine, the statute of the national minorities in general and the Rusyn minority in particular, would have to be better defined. Taking into consideration that Rusyns are being recognized as a distinct national minority in the E.U. states already named, we suppose that in case that the Western orientation of Ukraine will continue, the situation of the Carpathian Rusyns will change, having the possibility to be recognized in time as a national minority, not just a regional one.

An important component of this chapter is represented by the competing politic and economic integration projects, European Union and Eurasian Economic Union. The evaluation of these two entities, from an economic and politic point of view is extremely important, considering the fact that the present situation occurred due to the desire of a part of the Ukrainian society to follow a European path.

The conclusions include the main results of the research, as well as some recommendations addressed to the decision makers from Ukraine as well as from other states within which are found consistent Rusyn communities. We consider the most relevant findings to be the following:

1. We believe that it is very important that political decision-makers in countries with a significant number of Ruthenians resume communication on this sensitive issue of domestic politics as well as foreign policy. Without a consensus of all the actors involved, the Ruthenian movement could be used by third-party political actors to achieve their own political goals.

2. In our opinion it would be very important for the international organizations/actors, to persuade Ukraine to apply more open policies towards the Rusyn minority in Transcarpathia, considering that, in our opinion, this group (par ensemble) does not pose a threat to the integrity of the Ukrainian state.

3. We assume that it is in the interest of all state actors that the Rusyn agenda to be unified, as a result of the even closer collaboration between the states where important Rusyn communities are found. Through a close relationship and collaboration, a practical framework, can be developed that could have a major direct impact on the communities. The thesis of Rusynism could be thus removed from the comfort zone of the academic environment, being implemented in the daily policies of the communities.

4. We recommend closer cooperation both between the Ruthenian communities in different countries as well as between the authorities of these countries. As a result of such cooperation, the chances of an accelerated and sustainable economic development in the cross-border area are improved.

5. We realize that the interests of the Russian Federation in the area are relatively high. Given this, we consider such movements of identity emancipation very vulnerable. Their vulnerability lies in the fact that identity groups as well as institutions representing these groups can derail from their political and social pathways, being hijacked by the interests of third parties such as the Russian Federation.

6. The European Union, through its institutions, has the responsibility to defend the development of such ethnic groups as long as they do not threaten the good development of the European space or its neighborhood through their political game.

7. The issue of developing a Europe of the regions will need to be reexamined within the empowered institutions as a result of the regional, ethnic, identity or even nationalistic movement on the European continent. Such movements must not be brutally suppressed, but they need to be integrated into a network that serves the development of the regions in question and not certain momentary interests of some countries or even political leaders.

The bibliography is formed both from primary sources official documents issued by European institutions, international institutions or national institutions, online press articles) as well as secondary sources (volumes, articles in edited volumes, electronic articles). We tried to consult the most actual publications from our research area, hoping that the research will be as precise as possible.

Ethnicity, as well as the ethnic/national belonging of the Transcarpathian Rusyns was analyzed by different researchers. This detail could be deduced directly or indirectly from our research a well. We have not found a research related to the Rusyn movement, that would analyze the effects created by the Rusyn idea in the Carpathian region in general, manipulated by different actors like the Russian Federation or Ukraine, whose interests might not coincide with the interests of the states found in the Carpathia basin, which are member states of N.A.T.O. and the E.U.

The analysis of certain politic realities and actions, which are taking place in Romania (for example), but which are not being analyzed by the local or the central mass-media only marginally, in what concerns the involvement of the Russian authorities true the Rusyn channels in the northern part of Romania, we consider that represents a innovative element, which can help us to better understand which are the real political and strategic intentions of the Russian Federation in the Carpathia basin, and how can these intentions affect us directly, even if apparently, this action is focused only on the Rusyn minority from the Maramures region.

We consider that it is up to the reader to decide if the present study reached all the proposed goals. In the same time, it is up to the reader to judge if the elements that we consider to be of novelty, are indeed elements that can bring added value in the domain of international relations in general and in the domain of ethnic research – Rusyn problematic – in particular.

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