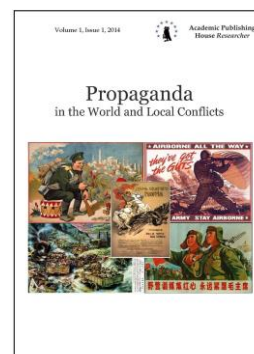


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The Manifestations of Soviet Propaganda and Separatism in North-Eastern Slovakia at the turn of 1944–1945 in the Context of the Annexation of Subcarpathian Ruthenia (Transcarpathian Ukraine) to the USSR

Michal Šmigel^{a,*}

^a Matej Bel University, Slovakia

Abstract

The development of a solution to the question of Subcarpathian Ruthenia in 1944–1945 which ultimately led to the withdrawal of this territory from the Soviet Union (initially called the Transcarpathian Ukraine), had a certain significance in the territory of Slovakia too. In the broader meaning, it had affected the situation around the so-called Ukrainian question in Slovakia. It emerged through the so-called Movement for annexation of northeastern Slovakia to Transcarpathian Ukraine (Soviet Ukraine) and the establishment of the Ukrainian National Council of Prjaševščina (at the turn of 1944–1945 or at the beginning of 1945), evidently being carried out with the support of the Communist authorities in Transcarpathia, the Red Army headquarters and Soviet State Security Departments. The events in Transcarpathia have obviously influenced developments in northeastern Slovakia and had a major impact on the political activation of some local representatives of the Ukrainian population (as it was in the case in the Marmaros-Sighet region of Romania) who, at the time of the liberation of Eastern Slovakia, had not any clear idea of the further orientation. At the beginning of their activities, they attempted to imitate the variant of the Transcarpathian sovietisation and were supported by Soviet military and security structures. Clearly, this was a local initiative developed and coordinated by Uzhhorod which the Soviet leadership in Moscow had tolerated for some time (as a means of pressure on the Czechoslovak government and president Beneš to give up Subcarpathian Ruthenia to the Soviet Union as soon as possible) and then halted regarding the willingness of Czechoslovak government officials not to complicate relations with Kremlin and carry out the handover of Subcarpathian Ruthenia to the USSR in 1945.

Keywords: Subcarpathian Ruthenia, sovietisation of Transcarpathian Ukraine, Movement for annexation of north-eastern Slovakia to the USSR, Ukrainian National Council of Prjaševščina, Soviet propaganda and agitation, Slovakia in Czechoslovakia in 1944–1945.

1. Introduction

The development of a solution to the issue of Subcarpathian Ruthenia between 1944 and 1945, which eventually led to the surrender of this territory to Soviet Union, also had, in a sense, some sort of response in Slovakia and, in a broader sense, influenced the situation concerning the so-called Ukrainian question in Slovakia. Let me remind you, that at the turn of 1944 and 1945, ideas on annexation of Subcarpathian Ruthenia (according to the Soviet term – Transcarpathian Ukraine) to the Soviet Ukraine began to spread in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. These ideas arose from

* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: michal.smigel@umb.sk (M. Šmigel)

the Red Army (further ČA) Headquarters, Soviet security forces and local communists. These efforts were given a specific form during the first congress of the National Committees in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which took place in Mukachevo on 26th November 1944 attended by 663 delegates from the Subcarpathian Ruthenia as a manifesto “to reunite the Subcarpathian Ruthenia with its great mother, Soviet Ukraine, and to separate from Czechoslovakia” (Vanat, 2001: 13-15). The subsequent events escalated quickly.

The local communists formed an independent Communist Party of Transcarpathian Ukraine and separated from the KSČ (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia). The National Council of Transcarpathian Ukraine ceased to cooperate with the government delegate (sent to this territory by the Czechoslovak government) František Němec and thus deprived the government of the ČSR (Czechoslovakia) of the ability to intervene and exercise its power in this territory. At the same time, a campaign was launched in Transcarpathia in which citizens expressed their consent by signing the Manifesto of 26th November (Švorc, 1996: 105-106). By the end of 1944, nearly a quarter of a million citizens had signed this declaration. It looked as if almost 90 % of the adult population of Transcarpathia, as Klement Gottwald claimed at the end of December 1944, expressed their wish to be annexed to the Soviet Union. However, it was not so unambiguous. The incoming news informed that the signatures were obtained under pressure, as was confirmed by the government delegate F. Němec. Under the influence of communists, such a situation was created in Transcarpathia that “anyone who would oppose the annexation to USSR would be exposed to severe attacks” (Kaplan, 1990: 30-31; see: Vidňanský – Gajdoš, 1995: 80-87). As historian M. Gajdoš stated, it is understandable that in this situation only few had the courage to oppose, especially of these efforts were apparently supported by the Red Army and the NKVD authorities (Gajdoš, 1994: 105).

2. Materials and methods

Material basis of the research includes documents from central archives (the Slovak National Archives, the Military History Archives) and regional archives of Slovak republic and Slovak periodicals. Other sources are represented by Slovak and foreign scientific publications to issues published in recent years.

Methodological basis of the research consists of principles of objectivism and historicism. These principles enable impartial and objective approach to analysis of researched problems, critical evaluation of sources and summarization of knowledge (through analytical, progressive and comparative method, direct and indirect method) as a result of analysis of reality and depiction of phenomena in the course and context of historical situation.

3. Discussion

Even today, it is difficult to pinpoint precisely how important was the role played by Moscow in the *first phase* (!) of the separation of Subcarpathian Ruthenia (Transcarpathian Ukraine) from Czechoslovakia. Was it an initiative of local communists, the high-ranking intelligence officers in the Red Army, an operation of the Ukraine government, or a double game of the Kremlin after all? Either way, this act was convenient for the Soviet leadership in Moscow, because it was interested in this, in their view, strategically important territory which made a military entry to the west and the control of Central Europe easier.

Despite all this, the situation in Transcarpathia caught the Czecho-Slovakian officials off guard for a moment and the KSČ leadership in Moscow, who did not expect such a development, even though the exile President E. Beneš considered the eventual surrender of this territory to the USSR in 1939, and he even promised it in 1943 to Joseph Stalin to create a common border with the Soviet Union for strategic reasons. There were also some concerns that this could be a precedent for the Slovak communists who, during the period of illegality, especially in 1939 – 1944, flirted with the dangerous idea of “Soviet Slovakia”, that means they wanted Slovakia to be attached to the Soviet Union.

The Czechoslovak communists adjusted their position according to Moscow’s instructions. Zdeněk Fierlinger, K. Gottwald, but also F. Němec and the representatives of the Slovak National Council (SNR), as a result of this development, recommended to President E. Beneš to rather carry out a “smooth annexation of the Transcarpathian Ukraine to the Soviet Union” (Kaplan, 1990: 34).

E. Beneš, however, took a wait-and-see position, still trusting J. Stalin and the Soviet leadership. He probably did not believe that the USSR would be able to deprive Czechoslovakia of its territory.

Vyacheslav Molotov, People's Commissar of the Foreign Affairs of the USSR, wrote a letter to E. Beneš, in which he apologized for the incident that occurred in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Later even Stalin himself contacted E. Beneš in a similar fashion and informed him that "the Soviet government does not intend to harm the interests of the Czechoslovak Republic or its prestige in any way" (Švorc, 1996: 107). E. Beneš was satisfied for a while. In his response, he assured J. Stalin that the issue will not be a subject of discussion with other powers, nor of a dispute between the two states. He suggested that it should be resolved after the war, when he would be able to consult with domestic officials (Kaplan, 1990: 36). By that he basically, figuratively speaking, untied the hands of Moscow and provided time for further activities.

The issue of Subcarpathian Ruthenia re-emerged in March 1945 due to a discussion on the post-war first Czechoslovak government program. The Czechoslovak communists in Moscow had proposed resolving this issue as quickly as possible and to start the urgent talks with the Soviet government, in which way it would be possible to attach the territory to Soviet Ukraine. Similarly, the Soviet government soon changed its strategy and began to openly press upon the Czechoslovak side, especially E. Beneš. During his visit to Moscow, it was presented to him as a *fait accompli*, although the opinions coming from the London exile environment stated that Czechoslovakia as a winner state of the WW II. cannot give up its territory and remain territorially weakened. As P. Švorc said, "the Czechoslovak government, at the beginning of April 1945 having a hearing on its government program, did not have the possibility to interfere with the ongoing changes in Subcarpathian Ruthenia" and "did not even try to". "It accepted the new reality and its program statement only confirmed what had already happened in Subcarpathian Ruthenia. It declared that the Subcarpathian Ruthenia will decide its own faith" (Švorc, 1996: 108).

As a result of the new international and domestic political situation, the problem of the Subcarpathian Ruthenia had taken on new dimensions. The issue of the questionable Cieszyn Silesia appeared on the foreign policy scene. In the Czechoslovak-Polish disagreement, Moscow acted as a smart arbiter who linked the question of Cieszyn Silesia to the issue of a surrender of the Subcarpathian Ruthenia. At this point, under the pressure of the situation, the Prague government had decided to use the Subcarpathian Ruthenia to strengthen the Czechoslovak positions in solving the problem with the Poles. As Minister Václav Majer said, the Czechoslovak government can gain a lot in Moscow during the talks on the issue of Cieszyn Silesia "when we can point out that we, like the Poles, agreed with the adjustment on the East in favour of the Soviet Union" (Bobák, 1998: 12). Similarly, Václav Kopecký pointed out that the "de facto sovereignty over the Transcarpathian Ukraine no longer exists, and that it is actually only a legal implementation of this factual state" (Kaplan, 1990: 40). According to historian M. Barnovský, the final decision to close the case of Subcarpathian Ruthenia and thus to win Moscow's favour and a favourable position during the negotiations with the Polish government on the issue of Cieszyn Silesia was adopted at a government meeting on 18th June 1945. Deputy Prime Minister K. Gottwald justified it by saying that if Czechoslovakia clearly declares that it surrenders the Subcarpathian Ruthenia to the Soviet Union, it will get into "a similar situation as the Poles on the eastern border, which would be psychologically favourable" (Barnovský, 2002: 14).

Before that, on May 16, 1945, Prime Minister Z. Fierlinger announced for radio and press that an autonomous government of Transcarpathian Ukraine had been formed, which expressed the wish to incorporate the Transcarpathian Ukraine into the Soviet Union. The Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak Government also stated: "President E. Beneš and our government intends to resolve this issue with Moscow in the spirit of the most sincere friendship as the population of the Carpathian Ukraine wishes" (Pravda-1).

4. Results

On the internal political discourse, a new impulse for the government of the restored Czechoslovakia to quickly proceed to address the Subcarpathian issue. Concerns of E. Beneš and some Czechoslovak politicians that the Transcarpathian variant of sovietisation may continue and end in an annexation of part of the Slovak territory were not, in fact, entirely unfounded. The events in Transcarpathia clearly influenced the development in north-eastern Slovakia, and had a naturally major impact on the political mobilization of some representatives of the Ruthenian

and Ukrainian population who, at the time of the liberation of Eastern Slovakia, had no clear idea of their further orientation and were facing dilemma - to follow the example of Transcarpathian Ukraine or build their own status in cooperation with the Czechs and Slovaks (Šutaj, 1988: 52). However, the slogans of sovietisation of the country began to re-emerge spontaneously and spread the idea of uniting the north-eastern Slovakia with Transcarpathian Ukraine, that is with the USSR (see Gajdoš et al., 2006: 6-9).

An initiative developed by the Temporary National Committee of the Prjaševian and Russian Ukrainians (Vanat, 2001: 19-21), which on its first meeting in Uzhhorod on 29th November 1944 adopted a resolution similar to that of the Mukachevo addressed to the National Council of Transcarpathian Ukraine, was nonnegligible in this respect. In the resolution, the Temporary Committee called for "...to attach the entire Prešovian Ukraine (i.e., north-eastern Slovakia – *M.Š.*) with the Galician Lemkivshchyna (Lemkovyna, south-eastern Poland – *M.Š.*) to the Free Mother of Transcarpathian Ukraine" (Gajdoš et al., 1999: 38-39). Certain uneasiness was also caused by the fact that, with the support of the Soviet security forces from Subcarpathian Ruthenia, a group of agitators began to enter the territory of Slovakia between 1944 and 1945, trying to instigate a movement for annexation of the Transcarpathian Ukraine (Soviet Ukraine) among the population of north-eastern Slovakia.

The overall situation in the border regions was also complicated by the fact that the Red Army occupied six Slovak municipalities in eastern Slovakia. Even the National Council of Transcarpathian Ukraine began to intervene in the border districts of north-eastern Slovakia (Bobák, 1998: 10).

"The fact that in Transcarpathia they also seriously counted on the annexation of the north-eastern districts of Slovakia inhabited by Ruthenian population – a so-called Prjaševščina (understand Prešovsko – *M. Š.*), is indirectly confirmed by a record from the discussion at the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Transcarpathian Ukraine held on 27th November 1944, where it was criticized that the best cadres coming from Prjaševščina are not represented in the National Council of Transcarpathian Ukraine" (Gajdoš, 1994: 107).

Similar tendencies appeared among some members of KRASNO¹ organization, who initiated the formation and establishment of the Ukrainian National Council of Prjaševščina (UNRP) since late 1944. The founders of UNRP seemed to have been inspired by reports on the activities of the Slovak National Council (SNR), but above all by the creation of the National Council of Transcarpathian Ukraine. The official establishment of UNRP took place later – on 1st March 1945 at a convention of delegates from municipalities and districts of eastern Slovakia, although according to the original plan the meeting should already have taken place on 15th February 1945.

However, the original deadline was postponed probably because the members of the Preparatory Committee² were conducting an agitation in eastern Slovakia for uniting its territory with the Soviet Union (Šutaj, 1988: 53). An assumption, that in this regard they were engaged under the direct impulse coming from Uzhhorod and high military officials of ČA (Gajdoš et al., 1999: 39-41), is realistic. In principle – due to the similar (and parallel) ongoing events in north-western Romania (Movement for the annexation of the Marmara-Sighet region to Transcarpathian

¹ Karpatoruskij sovet nacionalnogo osloboždenija – KRASNO (in Engl. Carpatho-Russian Council for National Liberation) – a resistance organization in eastern Slovakia founded in September 1943 to help refugees from Nazi concentration camps and to support the development of the anti-fascist movement in the region. Members and co-workers of the organization also carried out intelligence activities and organized supplies for the partisan units operating in eastern Slovakia. However, the group's activity was more visible in the work of individuals than of the organisation. Among the founding members of KRASNO – P. Babej, P. Kapišovský, V. Karaman, I. Židovský, P. Židovský, D. Rojkovič, P. Jurečko, T. Seman, I. Nachaj etc. – were also the later founders of the Ukrainian National Council of Prjaševščina (Pažur, 1974: 84).

² The Preparatory Committee of the Ukrainians (Prjaševščina) was established at the regional conference of the KSS, which took place in Prešov on 13th February 1945 with the participation of 32 representatives from Stropkov, Svidník, Bardejov, Prešov, Sabinov and Giraltovece districts. That the Preparatory Committee played an important role in the formation of the UNRP is indirectly evidenced by the fact that the representatives of the Democratic Party later blamed the UNRP for not inviting the people to the establishing congress, but only the delegates of the Preparatory Committee, and demanded the reorganisation of the UNRP on a party basis (Šutaj, 1988: 53).

Ukraine), at about the same time (mid-January – the beginning of February 1945) – it is possible to speak of a coordinated action (see Gajdoš, 1998; Gajdoš, 2013).

Apparently, local Ukrainian activists proceeded according to the scenario developed outside Slovakia, i.e. as it was in Subcarpathian Ruthenia and then in Marmaroschine, and tried to develop a broad popular movement for Prjaševščina's annexation to the Soviet Union. The cooperation of the founders of UNRP with the Soviet armed forces is obvious also because its later President, Vasil Karaman¹, asked General Lev Mechlis, a member of the Military Council of the 4th Ukrainian Front, for help, informed him about the situation in Prjaševščina (Barnovský, 2002: 13), and the officers of the ČA participated in the business meetings as well (AZR-USR-1).

The fact that at the beginning of 1945 there really was an agitation among the population in the north-eastern Slovakia and that there was also a signature collecting under some kind of a drafted memorandum, was confirmed by several reports. Signatory actions for joining the USSR took place in various places and in the municipalities of the region, from Stará Ľubovňa to Snina. However, they were obtained in a diverse, often fraudulent way, frequently not without a pressure or threats (Gajdoš, 1994: 111). That is, similarly as in Transcarpathia, when collecting signatures to support the Manifesto of Mukachevo of 26th November 1944.

Remarkable in this case is the report of the Regional Administration of Defence Information (OBZ) of the 4th District Headquarter in Bratislava, which, on the example of the Snina district, reveals relatively detailed backstage attempts to develop the movement for uniting the north-eastern Slovakia with Transcarpathia: "Since the liberation of the Snina district by the ČA, there has been deliberate and organized agitation to attach this district to the ZU (Transcarpathian Ukraine – M. Š.). (...) This action is carried out primarily by the chairman of ONV Hákoš, the political director of ONVB Pytel', also by Dr. Hoffmann and, besides those, by notary Šmiga in Papín and the forest warden Senko in Zvala. The Chairman of the ONV and his faithful assistants are unlimited masters in the district of Snina. For their personal safety, they have at their disposal a completely faithful and inclined NB and the so-called city militia or police. (...) The Chairman of the ONV and his assistants used to take and are still taking *very frequent trips to ZU, mainly to Uzhhorod*, and according to the chairman of ONV, they also receive petrol from Perečín. The exact purpose of the trip could not be ascertained; however, it is probable from the testimonies of our citizens and the legitimate assumptions that they are traveling there *in order to force the annexation of the entire Snina district to ZU* (previously and still talking about attaching the territory reaching Poprad). This assumption, or almost certainty, is supported by several statements of the leading personalities of Snina themselves. The aforementioned notary Šmiga from Papín told the financial guard in Telepovce that everything was ready and that everything, district by district, will be attached to Russia. It is clear that this is a deliberate propaganda in order to attach some districts to ZU from the fact that an inventory is being done in the villages, or rather a signing campaign for joining ZU. Thus, in the village of Vyšná Jablonka, MNV meetings are held, during which speeches on uniting with ZU are given and the signing campaign is organized there as well. People are forced to sign under threats that if they do not sign the Russians will punish them when this territory is annexed to ZU. As a result of these threats, people are afraid of possible consequences and are signing. However, there are cases like in the ZU, when people say they will sign it to receive a maintenance allowance, *but in fact, it is an event for joining the ZU*. (...) It is certain that the mentioned people, who are assisted by teachers in the villages, are *almost openly agitating for joining the ZU*. It is also very likely that some Russian border units have occupied some of our land as a result of their "begging" and pleading. It is further likely that *their agitation is probably inspired by Uzhhorod*" (SNA-1).

Initiatives in this respect went even further. Nikita Khrushchev, then the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (Bolsheviks) of Ukraine – KS(b)U and the Prime Minister of the Ukrainian Government, recounts in his memoirs that in early 1945 the representatives of some district of eastern Slovakia where the Ukrainians lived² had visited him in Kyiv and asked for their district to be annexed to the Ukrainian SSR. N. Khrushchev replied that

¹ According to J. Bobák, UNRP originated from the support of the Soviet security forces and describes its President, V. Karaman, as a co-worker of the Soviet NKVD (Bobák, 1998: 12).

² According to several indications it is possible to believe that the delegation which visited N. Khrushchev in early 1945, came from the district of Snina.

this is not possible, as it would offend the Czechs, but especially Slovaks. He recommended the delegation to build socialism in close cooperation with the KSČ. After their departure, however, he took the whole matter to J. Stalin (Vanat, 2001: 24-25).

Obviously – considering the further development of the situation – there was insufficient coordination between the ČA command operating in eastern Slovakia and the political leadership of the USSR, that is, it is also possible to anticipate a change of tactics as ČA commanders were finally asked to suspend their initiative in this direction. Moscow did not want to risk any loss of reputation in the eyes of the Allies and, in particular, the forming government of the Czechoslovakia, as this could compromise the partnership relations and, in addition, the issue of Subcarpathian Ruthenia – regarded as a bilateral issue between Czechoslovakia and the USSR – would take on other dimensions, including the activation of international public opinion. Apparently, we can state with a certainty, that as a result of this (as M. Gajdoš points out), several agitators were summoned to the Soviet military command in Prešov in mid-February 1945, and were ordered to stop their activities. At the same time, they were warned that their conduct was not in accordance with the Czechoslovak-Soviet Alliance and was “premature in the given conditions” (Gajdoš, 1994: 108-109).

However, these separatist tendencies culminated during the visit of a delegation of Ukrainian municipalities and districts that took place in the Russian House in Prešov on 1st March 1945, and which declared the establishment of the Ukrainian National Council of Prjaševščina¹ as a national-political body representing the “Ukrainian and Russian population” living in eastern Slovakia (Encyklopédia, 1982: 170). UNRP objective was to protect and enforce the rights and interests of that population (Gajdoš - Konečný, 1994: 14). It was very clearly formulated in the draft of the organisation order, which stated that “UNRP is the highest and only universal representative of the Ukrainian and Russian (understand Ruthenian – M. Š.) population in Slovakia” (Bajcura, 1967: 90).

At the inaugural congress in Prešov, UNRP adopted a resolution, in which it declared its support for the Manifesto of the first congress of National Committees of the Transcarpathian Ukraine in Mukachevo, expressing its gratitude to J. Stalin for the liberation and granting the right to freely express one’s national sentiment and – most importantly – it re-sketches the idea of attaching the north-eastern territories of Slovakia to the Ukrainian SSR (AZR-USR-2). The overall atmosphere of the founding congress and the adoption of such resolution in many ways resembled the congress of National Committees of the Transcarpathian Ukraine, which declared the unification of Transcarpathia with Soviet Ukraine. The council hall was predominantly decorated with the portraits of J. Stalin and local officials. In the telegrams sent from Prešov only to the Soviet statesmen (J. Stalin, N. Khrushchev), the commander of the 4th Ukrainian Front, General I. Petrov, and to the National Council of Transcarpathian Ukraine, a hope that in the foreseeable future the entire Ukrainian nation would be united in one state and a request for a patronage were expressed.²

The fact that there was an attempt in the north-eastern corner of Slovakia to imitate the Transcarpathian variant of sovietising is evidenced by the UNRP’s call in its bulletin “Prjaševščina” for “the armed representatives of the Ukrainian people” to stay awake and to make sure that “our decisions are introduced to life and all deviations from our decisions are punished by law” (Prjaševščina). It was an obvious attempt to emulate the formation of people’s militia, as was the case in Transcarpathia (but also in Marmaroschine), in order to enforce its own intentions. Indeed, it is necessary to agree with the opinion that in north-eastern Slovakia there was a real danger of a dual governance during this period.

¹ The aforementioned Vasil Karaman was elected as a President of the UNRP, Peter Babej and Peter Židovský were elected Vice-Presidents, and Dr. Ivan Rohal-Iľkiv became a General Secretary.

² The salutatory telegram addressed to J. Stalin expressed hope that “the day when the ancient injustice is eliminated and the whole great Ukrainian nation is united in one state, is not far away”. The telegram addressed to N. Khrushchev – a plea not to forget to resolve the issue of Transcarpathian Ukraine, that “there are Ukrainians living in Prjaševščina, who, by their way of life and culture, are brothers, bound by blood, to the Transcarpathian Ukrainians. Now, we have a unique opportunity to freely determine our nationality. *We cordially ask for your patronage*”. The UNRP asked the National Council of Transcarpathian Ukraine “not to forget us” when dealing with the fate of the Transcarpathian Ukraine (AZR-USR-2).

However, it should be stressed that among the initiators of the founding of UNRP were members of the communist party of Ukraine nationality (or rather Ukrainian national orientation), who even held a very significant position in it. And after all, the most ardent supporters of the platform of uniting some north-eastern districts of Slovakia to the USSR (even reaching river Poprad, which caused considerable political uncertainty among the Ruthenian population) were among the eastern Slovak communists, although the leadership of the KSČ in Moscow and the leaders of the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) clearly distanced themselves from them (Gajdoš et al., 1999: 39-40). Leaders of this policy had apparent connections in Transcarpathian Ukraine (Konečný, 2002: 33) and cooperated intensively with the Soviet security authorities.

In addition to the resolution, UNRP proclaimed a national unity of the Prjaševščina's population and the people of Transcarpathian Ukraine and Russian nation (Bajcura, 1967: 73). An important fact in this situation was that the Ruthenians – inhabitants of north-eastern Slovakia, were presented by the UNRP in a new light. It identified them as Ukrainians, or rather as a Ukrainian national minority. The UNRP representatives wanted to increase the authority of the institution, especially in connection with the development in Transcarpathia, by giving them this name, which did not match the tradition or the sentiment of the majority of the population.

According to M. Gajdoš, the declaration of this attitude was in fact addressed to the political elites in Czechoslovakia, who should have been convinced that the presentation of the population by UNRP represents a responsible and equal partner to be reckoned with. At the same time, it should assist in enforcing the requirements presented by the UNRP (Gajdoš, 2000: 1-2). However, on the other hand, they understood the overall political tendency in this matter. Using a foreign and, for the Slovak language, de facto untranslatable term *Prjaševščina*, they irritated the Slovak national authorities, who feared the autonomist and separatist ambitions in the eastern Slovakian region (Gajdoš - Konečný, 1994: 14).

Representatives of the Czechoslovak Government, the SNR and the KSČ were literally surprised by this turn of events¹. Representatives of the Slovak communists informed about this matter the leadership of the KSČ in Moscow and K. Gottwald forwarded in a radiogram of 4th March 1945 to G. Husák the following instructions: “You have raised the Ukrainian question incomprehensibly for us, because we cannot respond only broadly. Because the annexation of the Slovaks districts populated by Ukrainians to the Transcarpathian Ukraine is not on the agenda of the day, this will be solved within Slovakia. It is clear that the Ukrainians are entitled to acquire national minority right within Slovakia. Whether this right should be done within the framework of territorial or cultural autonomy, or otherwise, will be addressed in the overall adjustment of the constitutional position of Slovakia”. In the next section of the radiogram, it was said that, as a temporary solution, it would be enough to create a certain national-representative body of Ukrainians, which would be recognized by the SNR and would also have some representatives in it. All the questions regarding the Ukrainian population would be dealt with in agreement with this body, but it would not have the nature of state administration itself. The final section warned: “We cannot, in any way, allow nationalist, anti-Soviet elements, who have now lost their foundation in western and Transcarpathian Ukraine and will try to settle themselves in eastern Slovakia, to infiltrate the National Committees in Ukrainian municipalities and districts, as well as the aforementioned “national-representative” body. Such elements must be detected and completely removed from public life of the Ukrainian minority. We also cannot allow the democrats to flirt with them. With regard to the so-called Ukrainian and Russian directions, the question now arises differently as it did during the pre-Munich Republic. The population as a whole is considered to be Ukrainian, who wants to, however, can declare himself to the Russian nation and the schools can be both Ukrainian and Russian, depending on what will the population want. However, we continue to oppose the so-called rusinism as a fabrication of Hungarianization” (Barnovský, 1996: 65-66).

¹ According to M. Gajdoš, the great ambitions of the UNRP officials are also evidenced by the fact that on 3rd March 1945, they asked the President E. Beneš through a letter given to him by the government delegate F. Němec, to allow the UNRP representatives to participate in the negotiations between the Czechoslovak political parties and SNR, which took place in Moscow in March 1945. Apparently, they wanted to take part in the Moscow negotiations (among other things) to present and, if necessary, enforce the surrender of Prjaševščina to the Soviet Ukraine (Gajdoš et al., 2006: 7).

This *expressis verbis* message became a directive for the leadership of the Slovak communists on how to proceed in the case of UNRP and its demands. From the quoted document, the possibility of granting a certain degree of autonomy to the “Ukrainian” minority is quite obvious, but the further undefined possibility expressed by K. Gottwald in the phrase “or otherwise” is also nonnegligible. At the same time, the KSČ leadership in Moscow warned and called attention to the “anti-Soviet element”, which, as we will see below, was really closely monitored in the post-war republic. In any case, the KSS strictly followed the instructions of K. Gottwald.

Czechoslovak state authorities and political organizations had begun to develop an initiative to calm the situation in eastern Slovakia. At the same time, they were determined to defend the “undermined” integrity of the restored republic at all costs. At a meeting of representatives of the KSS with the representatives of the KSČ leadership in Moscow, which took place on 8th April 1945 in Košice, G. Husák declared: “The Party clearly stated, it wishes to live in peace with the Ukrainians. The Ukrainian National Council has not come up with any proposal to this day, *but it makes actions that make the citizens nervous*”. P. Babej, a member of the UNRP chairmanship, opposed him by justifying its orientation on the USSR by a critical socio-economic situation of the population in north-eastern Slovakia and the lack of help from the Czechoslovak authorities. He stated: “Therefore, the Ukrainian people see no other salvation as the one from the East” (Šutaj, 1988: 56).

As far as Moscow is concerned, in the given situation it was not as much concerned about uniting a part of eastern Slovakia and USSR. The Soviet government had not expressed any interest in this territory, which may have more hurt its authority on an international scene than help it. It was the first attempt to blackmail or force E. Beneš and the Prague Government to surrender Subcarpathian Ruthenia as soon as possible to the Soviet Union. For Moscow’s leadership, it was not desirable to question its credibility and to risk conflicts with the allies when the spheres of influence were being decided. The Transcarpathian precedent could not repeat itself in north-western Romania, not to mention in north-eastern Slovakia. Much more pragmatic was to gain decisive influence over the entire country than to attach other relatively insignificant territory to the USSR (Gajdoš, 1998: 2).

Even the UNRP leaders gradually began to realise that attaching part of eastern Slovakia to USSR was unrealistic both from the international as well as domestic political point of view. UNRP’s intentions could not be realised due to the fact that the entire spectrum of the Czechoslovak political representation insisted on the territorial integrity of the Czechoslovak Republic after the apparent loss of Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Not to mention that the annexation of a part of eastern Slovakia to USSR based on the ethnic principle was almost impossible, because the so-called Ukrainian, or rather Ruthenian population did not form a compact settlement. At the same time, a very dangerous precedent could be created for the Hungarian and Polish minorities in Czechoslovakia, what the Czechoslovak government and the Slovak National Council could not afford to allow.

Gradually, the UNRP-led movement for attaching the territory to the USSR began to weaken and eventually ceased to exist (although it did not gain a more massive support among the population, in some circles at home and in exile, however, it existed until 1947) (Konečný, 1997: 72). The situation calmed down and cleared only after 9th April 1945 when a meeting of the leading figures of UNRP V. Karaman, P. Babej and I. Rohal’-Il’kiv with the representatives of the Slovak National Council G. Husák and T. Tvarožka took place in Košice. UNRP had shown willingness to cooperate with the SNR in addressing political, economic and cultural issues and peculiarities of the Ruthenian (Ukrainian) population and actively engaging in the post-war reconstruction and restoration of the country. In this respect, they have been assured that the SNR will create the conditions for the requirements of the Ukrainian representation to be fulfilled. It was also agreed that UNRP will develop a memorandum in which it will formulate its views on the current problems of the population it represents and, which will be submitted to the Presidium of the SNR (Gajdoš, 1994: 110; Gajdoš et al., 2006: 9).

After the Moscow negotiations in March and the declaration of the Košice Government Programme – the government of the National Front of Czechs and Slovaks on 5th April 1945, and after the negotiations of the UNRP delegation with the representatives of political parties, the figures of UNRP began to shift their attention towards building the Czecho-Slovak platform of its further direction (Šutaj, 1988: 57).

On 22nd April 1945, UNRP drafted a memorandum (see Vanat, 2001: 56-59), which it handed over to the SNR representatives on 5th May 1945. The document contained a wide range of political and cultural requirements that the state authorities should implement in order to address the “Ukrainian” issue (Bajcura, 1967: 76). UNRP also expressed its full support to the Košice Government Programme, while demanding proportional representation of the Ukrainians in the SNR, the central governmental authorities at the Commissariats of the SNR and other institutions, state administration and judiciary authorities, especially in the districts with “Ukrainian” population. Particular attention was paid to the development of Ukrainian (Russian) national education and the establishment of a department managing these schools at the Commissariat for Education and Enlightenment of the SNR (Gajdoš, 1991: 7). In early May 1945, the Deputy Prime Minister of the National Front, K. Gottwald, expressed through the press that the Czechoslovak government considers the Ukrainians from Slovakia to be equal citizens of the republic, who should be treated as equals. He promised that the government will take all measures to meet the demands of the Ukrainian population (Hlas ľudu).

Meanwhile, the SNR discussed the memorandum and, by the end of May 1945, informed the UNRP that it accepts their demands: “...greet and welcomes the political, economic and cultural movement of the Ukrainian population living in Slovakia. With full understanding, it will monitor the efforts to consolidate the Ukrainian national consciousness within this part of the Slovak population, furthermore, the efforts to release and develop its hidden creative strengths and will support them by all means. (...) In the name of the Slovak people, we declare that it will always make sure that its relationship with the Ukrainians is as heartfelt as possible so that there is no room for bitterness for the crimes committed against Ukrainians in any Ukrainian heart” (Bajcura, 1967: 78). Soon, the SNR had taken specific measures to meet the requirements defined by the UNRP, which took steps to ensure the realisation of the demands in memorandum.

Although UNRP had distanced itself from separatist ideas and started to proclaim its support for the Košice Government Programme, its statements were not forgotten, but still remembered very vividly. It might be argued that the leaders of Czechoslovakia exercised the wait-and-see tactics for a while, but secretly sought an opportunity for the gradual liquidation of the UNRP (what indeed happened in early 1950s) as well as for the solution of the issue of the population supporting its advices – including the method of resettlement of the population into the USSR. The following recommendation of the Regional Administration of the 4th district’s OBZ Headquarters addressed to the Commissariat for Interior of the SNR in Bratislava confirms this idea: “It would be in a national and state interest to prevent these individuals (initiators of the movement – *M. Š.*) their further activities, because it could indeed happen that, on the basis of their request, this territory would end up annexed to the ZU (Transcarpathian Ukraine – *M. Š.*), what, however, is not something people really want. But, however, if these individuals wish to go to the ZU, assuming they will be better off there, let them be given the opportunity or force them to opt for the ZU. At the ZU itself, we have many Slovaks who want to opt for Slovakia, and in case we resolve the issue of option, a displacement (on both sides) on a larger scale could be considered” (SNA-1).

Equally important is the issue of the north-eastern Slovak district’s Ruthenian population’s attitude towards the tendencies of annexing their region to the USSR, or rather Ukrainian SSR. It is said that “UNRP’s initial efforts to resolve the issue of the Ruthenians (Ukrainians) by attaching north-eastern Slovakia to Transcarpathian Ukraine did not gain any support, even though they lived in some domestic and exile circles up until 1947” (Konečný, 1997: 72). In this regard, M. Gajdoš for example stated that in eastern Slovakia, especially in the Ruthenian environment, the idea of attaching part of this region to Transcarpathian Ukraine persisted for quite a while. This was reflected not only in the initial period of UNRP’s activities, but also later on other occasions. The relatively unpredictable situation was related to the demarcation of the Czechoslovak-Soviet border, there were various rumours circulating among the population about the possible annexation of a part of eastern Slovakia to Transcarpathia. Overall, the Ruthenian population was loyal to the Czechoslovakia, although some of them were interested in joining the USSR¹. It was

¹ “The population of Ruthenian nationality living in eastern Slovakia is loyal to Czechoslovakia. Some proletarians of this ethnic group would like to join the USSR – rather to the Ukrainian SSR. This effort is strongly supported by the insufficient supplying of the eastern Slovakia in the Ruthenian provinces, which

mainly due to the poor supply situation in the region. Propaganda, that the corresponding commissariats are not interested in these regions because they will be surrendered to the USSR¹, was spreading (Gajdoš, 1996: 209).

Reports that its eastern part to Poprad will fall under the USSR, or rather that the Ruthenian population will be displaced into the USSR, were spreading all over Slovakia. This caused turmoil and protests of some municipalities, as well as individuals. This is also evidenced by the letter of the Greek-Catholic parish priest from the village of Jarabina addressed to the District National Committee (ONV) in Stará Lubovňa on 4th October 1945. It characterizes the described events very accurately and is remarkable because it shows the view of the population itself on the aforementioned events:

“Most sincerely, please, tell the competent authorities that the people of Jarabina is outraged by the reports that the Russians demand from the ČSR to displace all the Ruthenians into Russia, more precisely Ukraine, because they say it is the will of the Ruthenian people. The Ruthenians absolutely do not wish to belong to the USSR, and if *some of them signed some sort of memoranda in January and February of this year (1945 – M. Š.) that they wish to belong to Russia, they did so unaware, tricked by teachers and pseudo-intellectuals similar to them, who scattered among Ruthenian villages and claimed to be collecting signatures in villages that wish to have Ruthenian schools, are need of spring seeds, etc.; and none of them ever talked about what was actually going on, otherwise no one would sign these foolish memoranda. My tricked believers are asking me to point out that all of the abovementioned little people, who rakishly collected the signatures on their own deserve to be declared treasonous and to be kicked out of the ČSR to the USSR so that they get what they deserve and try themselves what they wished for..., because all my believers, as well as the Ruthenians from the neighbouring villages, always felt like being Czechoslovaks, always fought for the integrity of the ČSR and wish to remain faithful citizens of their beloved homeland, the Czechoslovak Republic. When necessary, all the mentioned will sign certificates stating they are feeling to be Slovaks to be left in peace once and for all and not be bothered by this eternal fear that they are to be, or could be displaced at some point into Russia just because they were born Ruthenians. They say they have nothing against someone, who likes being in the USSR, voluntarily moving there, but that all of them can absolutely never be forced to move there. In addition, more than 70 boys already left or will leave in the next few days for the work in coal mines in the Czech lands just because they once heard they would be displaced to Russia*” (ŠALpSL).

We are of the opinion that the UNRP did not enjoy the mass support of the Ruthenian population even at the beginning of its separatist existence, nor after announcing its support of the Košice Government Programme. As resulting from the analysis of the contemporary documents, the inhabitants of eastern Slovakia were rather concerned with existential problems and the elimination of the consequences of the war in everyday life. The backstage political games and ambitions of the UNRP worried the population and brought uncertainty into their lives (ŠALpP).

The very crossing of the front and the direct contact with Soviet soldiers, as well as the circulating information on the situation in Transcarpathian Ukraine brought by the refugees, forced the ordinary people to think and consider their position in the ČSR, as evidenced by several contemporary reports and accounts of the Slovak security forces. “The population of the border area is 100 % behind the Czechoslovak Republic, because the refugees from the East and North are confirming them in their beliefs...” (VHA-1). “There is a certain degree of dissatisfaction, especially in the border regions, as the population is worried about the definitive solution of the state border between Czechoslovakia and the USSR. This population, which is mostly of the Ruthenian nationality, expresses openly its desire to be loyal to the ČSR and to stand by its current constitutional status” (SNA-4). And finally: “Our civilians in the Czechoslovak border is mainly of the Ruthenian nationality, sympathizes with the Ukrainians in Transcarpathian Ukraine, with the Ukrainians in Poland... Is 100 % of Czechoslovak thinking because it sees how badly the Ukrainians

then spread propaganda that the Commissariat for Food and Supply does not care for these regions, because they should be surrendered to the USSR” – as was observed by the Commissariat for Interior of the SNR (SNA-3).

¹ “According to the incoming reports from Košice, the citizens of Košice are worried because of the news that the East (understand eastern Slovakia – M. Š.) is going to be attached to the USSR, resulting in the refusal of the incoming officials to move to Košice” (SNA-2).

are treated in the neighbouring countries. *It is hostile towards those who were lobbying in the spring of 1945 and collecting signatures supporting the annexation to the USSR.* They see that its salvation, primarily from the material point of view, lies in the ČSR” (VHA-2).

5. Conclusion

Between 25th and 30th June 1945, negotiations between a Czechoslovak and Polish delegations on the issue of Cieszyn and Subcarpathian Ruthenia took place in Moscow. The delegation of the ČSR was led by Prime Minister Z. Fierlinger, its members were Jan Ursíny, Vladimír Clementis, Ludvík Svoboda, Hubert Ripka, Zdeňek Nejedlý, Adolf Procházka. One of the outcomes of the so-called Moscow Award on the Cieszyn issue was an agreement between the ČSR and USSR of 29th June 1945 on the surrender of Subcarpathian Ruthenia (Transcarpathian Ukraine)¹ to the Soviet Union (Bobák, 1998: 12).

The treaty was concluded in Kremlin in the presence of the Premier of the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR, J. Stalin. The treaty was signed by an authorized representative of the President of the ČSR, the Prime Minister Z. Fierlinger, and the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, V. Clementis, on the Czechoslovak part, and by deputy of a Premier of the Council of People's Commissars and a People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR, V. Molotov, for the USSR. After signing the agreement, Z. Fierlinger and V. Molotov appeared with a ceremonial speech in front of the delegations of both countries. As the communist “Pravda” noted in the days following the meeting: “There is no doubt that the peaceful surrender of this territory to the Soviet Union morally strengthens the Czech territorial claims concerning the future of Cieszyn Silesia and a part of the German Silesian region that are being discussed in Moscow” (Pravda-2).

By signing the Agreement on the Surrender of the Subcarpathian Ruthenia to the USSR, the original idea from the Slovak National Uprising period according to which he restored Czechoslovakia would become a federal state of three Slavic nations: Czechs, Slovaks and Subcarpathian Ruthenians – ceased to be relevant (see Vanat, 1968: 367). It meant, among other things, that the national individuality of the Ruthenian (Ukrainian) population of Slovakia could only be accepted in the form of recognition of the status of a national minority (Gajdoš - Konečný, 1994: 14). And for the minorities, the post-war Czechoslovak political representation had a special (negative) attitude that in the case of the Ruthenians and Ukrainians from Slovakia had manifested itself in the Czechoslovak-Soviet mutual relocations of the population in 1946 – 1947 (see Šmigel', 2004). However, it is another subject of wider contexts of the problem.

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¹ The day before the signing of this agreement (28th June 1945), during the negotiations between Z. Fierlinger and V. Clementis with V. Molotov and J. Stalin, the latter asked the Czechoslovak representatives whether “it is appropriate for the government of ČSR to signed the given Agreement right now” and also pointed out that: “We are not pressuring you. Act as you see fit in this matter”. Z. Fierlinger, however, replied that “the Czechoslovak government considers this moment to be appropriate for the conclusion of the agreement and, therefore, comes with the proposal to sign the treaty itself” (Vostočnaja Evropa, 1997: 230).

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