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Lemkos – the rediscovered nation

In 2016, the publication of Marek A. Koprowski appeared on the publishing market under the intriguing title of *Lemkowie. Losy zaginionego narodu* (*Lemkos. The fate of the lost nation*). The author is a journalist specializing in Eastern issues. In his publications, he focuses on the lives of Poles in the former Borderlands of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. He published, among others: *Kresy w II Rzeczypospolitej* (2012); *Wołyń. Mówią świadkowie ludobójstwa* (2016); *Mord na Wołyniu. Zbrodnie ukraińskie w świetle relacji i dokumentów. Tom 1* (2017); *Akcja "Wisła". Ostateczna rozprawa z OUN-UPA* (2017).

The book consists of two parts: the first, as the author himself described, is *Subiektywna historia Łemków* (*Subjective history of the Lemkos*) (pp. 7-105). The second one consists of three memories of the Lemkos: Teodor Gocz – *Łemkowska dola* (*Lemkos fate*) (pp. 107-80); Maria Gocz – *Wygnaniec ze Smerecznego* (*The Exile from Smereczny*) (pp. 181-216) and Bogdan Gambal – *Ruska Bursa wróciła do życia* (*Rus School came back to life*) (pp. 217-37). The publication is additionally enriched by numerous photos, maps and illustrations. The whole gives a picture of the difficult and complicated fate of the Lemko community.

According to the Act on National and Ethnic Minorities and the Regional Language of January 6, 2005, the Lemkos belong to one of four ethnic groups (alongside with Karaim, Roma and Tatar)¹. During the National Census in 2011, 10,531 people declared their Lemko nationality, including 5612 people who declared it as the only nationality, 7086 as the first or the only one, and 3445 as the second nationality. Among people declaring the Lemko nationality, 5,000 lived in the Lower Silesia Region, 2,000 in the Małopolskie Region (of which 1.5 thousand declared only the Lemko nationality)².

¹ Dz. U., No. 17, item 141, with later changes.

² *Ludność. Stan i struktura demograficzno-społeczna. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2011*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Warszawa 2013, p. 91; *Raport z wyników w województwie dolnośląskim. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2011*. Wrocław, Urząd Statystyczny we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 2012, pp. 62-63; *Raport z wyników w województwie małopolskim. Narodowy Spis Powszechny Ludności i Mieszkań 2011*. Kraków, Urząd Statystyczny w Krakowie, Kraków 2012, pp. 105-107.

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Lemkos are a nation that until the second half of the 1940s lived in the territory referred to in the Polish language as *Łemkowszczyzna* (Lemkivshchyna, Lemko region), and in the Lemko language *Łemkowyna* (Lemkowyna). It included the northern and southern slopes of the Carpathians located in Poland and Slovakia. Relations between the population living on both sides of the mountains were strong. They concerned both, material and spiritual culture, and the language³. In the interwar period, the area of Lemkivshchyna was 2136.63 km². There were 187 settlements in its territory (including about 170 inhabited almost exclusively by the Lemkos), their size varied: from small, for example, Smereczne – 2.97 km², to large, e.g. Bartne – 19.74 km². Basically, small or very small villages dominated⁴. In administrative terms, in the 1920s, it was divided into the counties: Nowy Targ, Nowy Sącz, Grybów (existed until 1932), Gorlice, Jasielsk, Krosno and Sanok⁵. In the interwar period, the number of Lemkos was estimated to be between 100,000-150,000. According to studies made on the basis of the general census of 1931, their total number was 130121 people⁶.

Koprowski in his narrative about Lemkos and Lemkivshchyna (although simplified, it was written with a great knowledge of the subject) presents the main problems bothering this community: the issue of origin, religious divisions (Greek Catholics and Orthodox) and nationalities (Lemkos and Lemkos-Ukrainians). In a symptomatic way he also refers to the comparison of Lemkos to Kurds, who live on the territories of several countries and have never had their own state. In addition, issues related to the economy, construction and culture of Lemkos were mentioned. The author rightly points out the differences in this area between West, Central and East Lemkivshchyna (on the latter with strongly marked Ukrainian influences).

An important part of the history of the Lemkos were events related to the shaping of its national identity (rivalry and disputes between supporters of the Ukrainian and Russophile option, with strong Polonophile sentiments) that took place in the shadow of great social and political events: the Bar Confederation, Spring of Nations, the abolition of serfdom and enfranchisement of peasants, World War I and II, Talerhof camp, and tragic consequences of displacement to Soviet Ukraine (1944-1946) and the “Vistula” operation in 1947.

The shaping of ethnic awareness of the inhabitants of Lemkivshchyna proceeded in a specific way, characteristic of the territory inhabited by them. The mountain area was an element conducive to the formation of group isolationism. Lemkos themselves, due

³ See: *Związki kulturowe po obu stronach Karpat w rejonie Łemkowszczyzny*, [in:] *Łemkowie w historii i kulturze Karpat*, Part 1, edit. J. Czajkowski, Rzeszów 1992, pp. 167-181.

⁴ However, due to the fact that Muszyna and Jaśliska were purely Polish towns, 30.61 km² should be deducted from its area, see: J. Czajkowski, *Studia nad Łemkowszczyzną*, Sanok 1999, pp. 162-163.

⁵ K.Z. Nowakowski, *Sytuacja polityczna na Łemkowszczyźnie w latach 1918-1939*, [in:] *Łemkowie w historii i kulturze Karpat*, Part 1, edit. J. Czajkowski, Rzeszów 1992, p. 323.

⁶ Data from: H. Duć-Fajfer, *Literatura łemkowska w drugiej połowie XIX i na początku XX wieku*, Kraków 2001, p. 8.

to their language, type of culture and religion, definitely felt their separateness from the Polish population. The relationship was emphasized, especially the spiritual one, with Ruthenia (Ruthenian faith, the Rus language, the name Rusnak-Rusin), which gave a sense of self-worth and pride. This influenced the development of certain features of mentality referred to as “Lemko conservatism”, which was further strengthened by group isolationism. This was connected with the worship of the mountainous landscape, as well as attachment and sentiment to homeland⁷. These elements would play an important role in the later history of this community.

The turning point in the awakening of the identity of the Lemkos were events related to the national and social movements initiated in the Spring of Nations (1848). At that time, activists and ideologues of individual national communities inhabiting the Habsburg monarchy put forward political and cultural demands to safeguard their national aspirations. Among the Ruthenians in Eastern Galicia, three main national orientations were formed: Old Ruthenian, Russophile and Ukrainian. They became the main battlefield for influence in this region in the second half of the nineteenth century⁸.

The main axis of disputes and conflicts in Lemkivshchyna was the rivalry between Russophile orientation and the Ukrainian nationalists among the Lemkos. The former was stronger and dominated in this area. It did not result, as Koprowski claims (referring to the findings of Bohdan Halczak) from the distance from the Lemkos region “from the Ukrainian centres of national life” and the lack of activity in the region of representatives of the Ukrainian intelligentsia⁹. The Ukrainianism imposed on the Lemkos was (and is) a historically alien national orientation. It also threatened their sense of self-determination, and using contemporary nationalist theories, the right to self-categorization. It was also one of the most important defensive elements among the population, who did not agree to Ukrainization. This process was strengthened also in the later period and it was visible, among others in relation of the Lemkos to the OUN-UPA or to the Ukrainian Social and Cultural Society (UTSK) established in 1956¹⁰. Later, an exemplification of this process were also events related to the establishment of the Association of Lemkos (1989) and Union of Lemkos (1990), organizations that personified two different national orientations.

The role of the Greek Catholic and Orthodox Church was also indicated. The latter, as Koprowski stresses, was the first in the lands inhabited by the Lemkos (p. 7). Until the

⁷ See: A. Kwilecki, *Łemkowie. Zagadnienie migracji i asymilacji*, Warszawa 1974, pp. 60-61; H. Duć-Fajfer, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁸ More about national movements in Eastern Galicia, see: J. Kozik, *Ukraiński ruch narodowy w Galicji w latach 1830-1848*, Kraków 1973; H. Wereszycki, *Pod berłem Habsburgów. Zagadnienia narodowościowe*, Kraków 1975; J. Moklak, *Łemkowszczyzna w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Zagadnienia polityczne i wyznaniowe*, Kraków 1997.

⁹ B. Halczak, *Dzieje Łemków od średniowiecza do współczesności*, Warszawa 2014, p. 85.

¹⁰ About the attitude of Lemkos to UTSK, see: S. Dudra, *Poza małą ojczyzną. Łemkowie na Ziemi Lubuskiej*, Wrocław 2008, pp. 171-180.

end of the seventeenth century, Lemkivshchyna was an area belonging to the Orthodox Przemyśl diocese. Only after Bishop of Przemyśl, Innocent Winnicki, joined the Brest Union in 1691 the process of spreading the influence of the Greek Catholic Church began in this area¹¹. It was continued with obstacles, because most of the Lemkos were attached to “their” religion. However, after several dozen years, Orthodoxy in this area disappeared. Despite the transition to Greek Catholicism, Lemkivshchyna did not break the spiritual ties with the Orthodox Church. The manifestation of this was, among others, the custom of pilgrimages to Orthodox monastic centres (Pochayiv Lavra, Kiev Pechersk Lavra)¹². Orthodoxy in this area began to revive in the first years of the twentieth century (this was influenced, among others, by the development of the Ukrainian national movement strongly associated with the Greek Catholic Church and the influence of the Russian Orthodox Church). Repression and persecution during the World War I, martyrdom of Fr. Maxim Sandowicz¹³ and memories of Talerhof¹⁴ (memorial obelisks and chapels were erected in the Lemko region in honour of the murdered in the interwar period) would become a permanent element integrating the Lemko community and a binding factor with the Orthodox Church (in the interwar period the manifestation of the phenomenon was the Lemkos return to the Orthodox Church)¹⁵.

The crucial moment in the history of Lemkos and Lemkos was the deportation actions from 1944-1947. They led to the “disintegration of Lemkivshchyna”, the temporary disappearance of religious and cultural life. Especially the “Vistula” operation was supposed to become the final element of Polonization of the Lemkos. During its implementation, a number of principles related to broadly understood human rights were vi-

¹¹ More about the Orthodox diocese in Przemyśl, see: K. Chodynicki, *Kościół prawosławny a Rzeczpospolita Polska. Zarys historyczny 1370-1632*, Warszawa 1934; M. Bendza, *Prawosławna diecezja przemyska w latach 1596-1681. Studium historyczno-kanoniczne*, Warszawa 1982.

¹² See: B. Halczak, *op. cit.*, p. 84

¹³ Fr. M. Sandowicz served in the pastoral service in the Lemko region, accused by the Austro-Hungarian authorities of anti-state activities and pro-Russian sympathies (connected with the Muscovite movement) and in 1914 shot in Gorlice without a court verdict, see: J. Charkiewicz, *Męczennicy XX wieku. Martyrologia prawosławia w Polsce w biografiiach świętych*, Warszawa 2004; *Żywot Świętego Maksyma Gorlickiego (Sandowicza)*, “Almanach Diecezjalny” 2005, No. 1, pp. 97-101; M. Bołtryk, *Sąd nad Świętym Maksymem*, Gorlice 2014.

¹⁴ The camp at Talerhof (near Gratz) was created by the Austro-Hungarian authorities and was intended mainly for Ruthenians (from Galicia and Bukovina) accused of Russophilism (the first arrests took place even before the outbreak of the war). The main reason was the mass accusations of favouring Russia and anti-state activities. In 1914, virtually all Lemko intelligentsia with Russophile views was arrested by the Austrian authorities. In the camp (functioning until May 10, 1917) there were about 7 thousand people (Russians, Ukrainians, Gypsies, Lemkos, Jews and Poles). Due to hunger, difficult sanitary conditions and outbreak of cholera, 1767 people died. At least 1915 Lemkos from 151 villages were imprisoned in Talerhof, of which 168 people were killed, see: *The Story of Talerhof. We Should Not Forget*, <http://www.carpatho-rusyn.org/kr/taler.htm> [access on: 20.06.2015]. The personal list of people who died in Talerhof was presented in “Almanach Diecezjalny” 2006, No. 2, pp. 214-258. The document was prepared for printing by Fr. Piotr Puczyk.

¹⁵ See more: J. Moklak, *Lemkowszczyzna w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej. Zagadnienia polityczne i wyznaniowe*, Kraków 1997; M. Bołtryk, *op. cit.*, Gorlice 2014; S. Dudra, *Sketches from the history of religion and identity of Orthodox Lemkos*, Chicago 2017, pp. 21-28, 37-41.

olated. Above all, the principle of collective responsibility was applied, the rights of free movement and settlement were limited. There was a breach of court rules and procedures, restriction of freedom without trial, freedom of religion and the principle of inviolability of property rights¹⁶. In the opinion of Timothy Snyder, the “Vistula” operation was a political “purge” of ethnicity, planned to change the ethnic geography of the new Polish state¹⁷. At the same time, it contributed to the birth of the “small homeland” myth. It was born and arose on the canvas of the nostalgia of people who had to leave it forcibly. Several generations could not reconcile the fact imposed by the authorities. For many families leaving Lemkivshchyna was associated, except for the loss of the entire life’s work, also with the loss of the spiritual point of support (leaving the church, graves of relatives). For this reason, after the resettlement, the Orthodox Church was an important and, in the initial period, the only element of preservation of their own identity. In the Recovered Territories, it became, in a sense, the depository of the national identity of the Lemkos. It should be emphasized that at the heart of the national culture of the Lemkos lay a religious factor (connected with both the Orthodox and the Greek Catholic Church). It was also, in various historical periods, one of the main culture-creating components of this community.

A separate subsection was devoted to the attitude of the Lemkos to the OUN-UPA. Koprowski emphasizes, referring to the memories of Stefan Stebelski “Chrin” (commander of the sotnia, part of the kurin of Vasiliy Mizerny “Ren”), that even in eastern Lemko region the recruitment among the Lemkos to the sotnia was difficult. It was analogous in its western and central parts. This is confirmed by the research of Julian Kwiek, who, based on the OUN reports, states that “[a]reas inhabited by the Lemko population is one great unknown for the organization. The population did not have the slightest idea of the OUN and the UPA, their activities and members, what is worse, they did not feel any organic bonds with Ukrainians, considering themselves something foreign”¹⁸. In fact, the UPA sotnias were operating in the Lemko region, but they were deprived of greater support from the local population.

The moment that changed the situation of the Lemkos after the World War II were the events of 1956. Changes in national policy also influenced attempts to institutionalize their activities. The intention of the authorities to make UTSK influential on the Lemko population, as well as to force the Lemkos to accept their own identity as a component of the Ukrainian minority, failed. Strictly Lemko (Rusyn) identity or more broadly Carpathian Rusyn were stigmatized and often used by the state authorities in the Ukraini-

¹⁶ K. Skubiszewski, *Akcja “Wisła” a prawo międzynarodowe*, “Tygodnik Powszechny”, No. 10, March 11, 1990; G. Pawlikowski, *Polityka władz wobec Kościoła prawosławnego w województwie lubelskim (kwiecień-wrzesień 1947)*, “Wschodni Rocznik Humanistyczny” 2010-2011, No. VII, Lublin- Radzyń Podlaski 2011, p. 319.

¹⁷ T. Snyder, *To Resolve the Ukrainian Problem Once and for All. The Ethnic Cleansing of Ukrainians in Poland 1934-1947*, “Journal of Cold War Studies” 1999, No. 2, p. 110, <https://doi.org/10.1162/15203979952559531>.

¹⁸ J. Kwiek, *Żydzi, Lemkowie, Słowacy w województwie krakowskim w latach 1942-1949/50*, Kraków 1998, p. 94.

an-Lemko conflict¹⁹. Jarosław Zwoliński, a Lemko activist from the former Zielona Góra Voivodship, assessing the 1st Congress and the fact of establishing UTSK, stressed that “it allowed the Lemkos to gain courage and boldness in clearly emphasizing their own distinctiveness”²⁰. Despite the initial involvement in UTSK’s activities (among other things due to the possibility of returning to Lemkivshchyna), some of the Lemkos refused to participate in its structures²¹. In many cases, it was a process of manifesting their national identity, which led to conflicts between Lemkos and Ukrainians (including accusations of Lemko separatism, dissolution of the UTSK Provincial Administration in Zielona Góra) and the intervention of Commission of Nationalities Affairs of the Central Committee. As a result, the Lemkos attempted to set up their own organization²². Already in May 1958, the Temporary National Organizing Committee of Lemkos and Rusyns in Poland was established. Its goal was to take action to recognize the Lemkos as a national minority. At the same time, in the adopted declaration, it was emphasized that “the Ukrainian Social and Cultural Association in Poland can not represent any Rusyn-Lemkos in any section of social and cultural life”²³. These activities were not approved by state authorities and until 1989, Lemkos-Rusyns did not obtain permission to set up their own association. In the book by Koprowski, despite the rich literature based on a source basis, there is no discussion of the topic of the formation of the Lemko movement in the western territories in the fifties and sixties of the last century. Such figures as, for example, Jan Czerhoniak, Jarosław Merena or Jarosław Zwoliński were completely omitted. This is the weakest part of the *Subiektywna historia Łemków*.

The situation has changed since 1989 and the foundation of the Association of Lemkos (chairman Andrzej Kopczka) – the largest organization supporting the national identity of the Lemkos (p. 95). Its creation, together with organizing of regional branches, contributed to the development of cultural and educational life. The response of the pro-

¹⁹ See: M. Kopystiańska, *Łemkowie na przełomie dziejów – grupa etniczna czy naród?*, “Rocznik Wschodni” 2003, No. 9, pp. 169-170; M. Barwiński, *Ukraińskie i łemkowskie struktury organizacyjne w Polsce w latach 1956-2012*, “Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Geographica Socio-Oeconomica” 2012, No. 12, pp. 114-145; E. Mironowicz, *MSW wobec konfliktu łemkowsko-ukraińskiego (1956-1966)*, “Białoruskie Zeszyty Historyczne”, 2000, No. 14, pp. 182-187.

²⁰ J. Zwoliński, *Rapsodia dla Łemków*, Koszalin 1994, p. 72.

²¹ Kazimierz Pudło rightly notices that a significant part of the Lemkos was disappointed in their expectations with the attitude of the UTSK Main Board towards the Polish authorities in matters of socio-political background of displaced persons. From 1957, they began gradually to withdraw from supporting all UTSK activities, even cultural and educational ones. The general assumptions of the programme and aims of the Society were criticized, considering them to be minimalistic and conciliatory in relation to the state, disregarding the “real needs of the Lemko nation”, K. Pudło, *Łemkowie. Proces wrastania w środowisko Dolnego Śląska 1947-1985*, Wrocław 1987, p. 95; see more: S. Dudra, *Poza małą ojczyznę...*, pp. 175-177.

²² It should be noted that already in the spring of 1956, the Lemkos from Torzym (Sulęcín county) made a postulate to form the Lemko organizations “following the model of the Ukrainian population”. Among the leaders of this movement were Andrzej Zwoliński and his son Jarosław Zwoliński, State Archives in Zielona Góra, KW PZPR, sygn. 531, Department II of the Provincial Office for Public Safety in Zielona Góra, 25 October 25, 1956, see more: B. Halczak, S. Dudra, *Tożsamość narodowa Łemków*, Gorlice 2013, p. 40.

²³ R. Drozd, *Polityka państwa wobec ludności ukraińskiej w Polsce w latach 1944-1989*, Warszawa 2001, p. 160.

Ukrainian side (activists of the Lemko Section of UTSK) was the establishment in 1990 of the Union of Lemkos (headed by Teodor Gocz)²⁴. This led to the consolidation and strengthening of existing national and identity divisions among the Lemkos. An additional field of conflict was the takeover of Lemko Watra in Zdynia by the Union of Lemkos, which in a short time transformed it into a strictly Ukrainian event.

In the publication, I did not notice any major substantive errors. There were, however, inaccuracies in the given names and surnames of Lemko activists. For example, the author states that Adam Kosowski was chosen as the treasurer for the Main Board of the Association of Lemkos (p. 92), in fact it was Stefan Kosowski. The board also included Dymitr Rusynko (one of the benefactors and founders of the association) but not Dymitr Rusenko (p. 92) as recalled by Koprowski.

The autonomous parts of the publication are the memories of Lemko activists. Teodor Gocz in *Lemkowska dola* partly refers to his memories *Życie Lemka (Lemko's life)* published in 2007²⁵. It is a record of the life of a person related to the socio-cultural activity of Lemkos in post-war Poland, and as Koprowski stresses the “almost legendary” person, the creator of the Museum of Lemko Culture in Zyndranowa²⁶. Maria Gocz (nee Buriak, from 1963 Teodor's wife) born in Smereczno recalls her native village through the prism of historical events from the past (including emigration to the USA, the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1920, displacements to Ukraine) with the final “Vistula” operation, which demolished “the world of Lemkos from Smereczny”²⁷. The last part is the account of Bogdan Gambal, coming from a generation already born in the western territories. After studying at the Jagiellonian University, he remained in Kraków, and became the initiator of establishing in 1991 the Ruska Bursa Association²⁸, ideologically connected with the Ruthenian movement and the Lemko Association.

²⁴ S. Dudra, *Lemkowie. Struktury organizacyjne Łemków w powojennej Polsce*, [in:] *Stowarzyszenia mniejszości narodowych, etnicznych i postulowanych w Polsce po II wojnie światowej*, edit. S. Dudra, B. Nitschke, Kraków 2013, pp. 256-286; see also: M. Barwiński, *op. cit.*; L. Filipiak, *Próby utworzenia niezależnej organizacji lemkońskiej w okresie PRL w świetle akt Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej w Warszawie*, [in:] *Lemkowie, Bojkowie, Rusini. Historia, współczesność, kultura materialna i duchowa*, Vol. IV, Part 1, edit. S. Dudra et al., Słupsk-Zielona Góra 2012, pp. 97-109.

²⁵ T. Gocz, *Życie Lemka*, Zyndranowa-Krosno 2007.

²⁶ Skansen of Lemko Culture in Zyndranowa was established in 1968 thanks to Teodor Gocz's efforts. For many years, the museum functioned as a private institution, first in the form of a House of Remembrance in the house of Gocz, later as an open-air museum set in the village. Currently, the museum has the status of the Branch of the Podkarpackie Museum in Krosno. Since 1992, the open-air museum has been the organizer of the annual event Święto Tradycji Lemkowskiej na Pograniczu Kultur Od Rusal do Jana.

²⁷ In 2016, The publication of Alexander Chudyk (pseudonym Leszek Hrabski) appeared on the history of the village's inhabitants *Smereczne na Lemkowszczyźnie. Wspomnienia i relacje*, Krosno-Smereczne 2016.

²⁸ The association acts as a Lemko cultural center, carrying out cultural, educational and publishing activities (publishing the scientific periodical “Rocznik Ruskiej Bursy”, the publishing series “Biblioteka Lemkowskiej Klasyki”). A youth music band called “Teroczek” and the theater group “Terka” operate at the Association. There is also a library and museum chamber of memory of Ivan Rusenka. The association is the founder of the first Lemko radio LEM.fm.

The title of the book by Koprowski is both intriguing, stimulating discussion, as well as not reflecting the real history of this nation. Despite their complicated fate, the Lemkos are not a “lost nation”. Like many other nations in the world (e.g. the aforementioned Kurds) they possess their own history, language and culture, factors determining being a nation. Despite the denial of this right by some Ukrainians, they constitute a historical community with a strong established identity. Nowadays, this is manifested in numerous scientific and journalistic articles, monographs, national and international conferences with cyclical “Łemkowie, Bojkowie, Rusini. Historia, współczesność, kultura materialna i duchowa” (“Lemko, Bojko, Ruthenians. History, Modernity, and Material and Spiritual Culture”) organized since 2007 and the activities of Lemko-Ruthenian cultural and scientific associations.

Subiektywna historia Łemków by Koprowski is well-written, at the general level it allows me to see the meanders of the history of the people living in Lemkivshchyna and the western territories of Poland. I recommend it for those who begin their adventure with the history of the Lemko nation.

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Abstract: The article describes the basic problems of the Lemko community in Central Europe, with particular emphasis on the population living in Poland, its fate, history and contemporary position in Poland, recalling, among other things, the activities of associations (the Association of Lemkos, the Union of Lemkos, organization of Watra). The author presented literature by analyzing the content of Marek Koprowski's book.

Keywords: Lemkos, orthodoxy, nation, ethnic minority, language

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