

Arkadiusz Tyda*

University of Zielona Góra, Zielona Góra, Poland

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7357-7391>

The consequences of the 1989 changes in the socio-political activity of Lemkos in Poland and the United States of America

The aim of this article is to present the socio-political situation of the Lemko community in Poland and the United States of America at the time of the fall of communism in Europe. The activity of Lemkos in both of these countries is extremely important for preserving the memory of Lemko tradition and heritage. In order to provide a more complete overview of the situation, it is presented in relation to earlier times – how Lemkos functioned in Poland and the USA after World War II, as well as what consequences the political transformation brought about in the following years.

Introduction

The first cultural and educational organizations were established in Lemkivshchyna already in the 19th century. Organizational activity and realization of Lemkos' ethnic aspirations is closely connected with the consciousness divisions within their community. The organizations tried to shape Lemkos' identity according to the separate national programmes they represented: Ukrainian or Rusyn (the latter in the Old Rusyn or Rusophile version) (Michna, 2013: 198). Also in the USA, already at the end of the 19th century, Lemkos began to organize themselves by forming brotherhood societies, actively participating in the life of Orthodox and Greek Catholic parishes, and then founding organizations.

The situation of Lemkos after World War II

After World War II, difficult times came for the Lemkos. They survived the camp in Jarorzno (Kamiński, 2001; 2003; Miroszewski 2001; 2002; Hałagida, 2012), and then were displaced from the Lemkos region – first to the Soviet Union (already from 1944), and then as part of the Operation “Vistula”, to the Western Territories of Poland.

* Correspondence address: Instytut Nauk o Polityce i Administracji, Uniwersytet Zielonogórski, Wojska Polskiego 69, 65-73 Zielona Góra, Polska, e-mail. a.tyda@ip.uz.zgora.pl.

The reluctance to 're-arrange one's life' at the place of resettlement in Poland was the direct reason for emigration to North America (Tyda, 2018: 37). There was also vivid recollection of the wrongs they had suffered in Talerhof during World War I (Hardy, Lane, 1964). In the USA, Lemkos could cultivate their traditions, develop their social life, and attend the Church – both Orthodox and Greek Catholic¹.

The contrast between the standard of living of Lemkos in Poland and in North America was significant. In communist Poland, the secrecy of correspondence was violated, Lemkos were summoned for interrogation, searches were carried out, the Church was persecuted, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was not respected and the freedom of travelling abroad was abolished². Nevertheless, Lemkos from Poland had contact with their relatives from the 'new world'. It was noticed by the Security Service (SB). Extensive correspondence with both the USA and Canada, as well as with the 'old lands' was found. In numerous reports, it was emphasized that Lemkos "walk around dressed in American clothes" (poviats: Międzyrzecz, Koźuchów, Głogów) and read illegal press *Karpatska Rus* (poviats of Skwierzyna, Sulęcín, and Szprotawa) (Dudra, 2008: 66). The Presidium of the National Council informed the superior authorities that a large part of the displaced persons still hoped to return to Lemkivshchyna. However, it should be doubted that the opinion of the party authorities was entirely accurate, that: "[...] these hopes were closely related to the international political situation and were formed on a platform of war moods constantly fueled by correspondence from the USA and Canada" (APZG, PWRN, USW, sygn. 557, k. 331).

Organizational activity of Lemkos in Poland after World War II

During the communist period, the Lemko community did not have its own separate ethnic organization, despite the attempts made by some Lemko leaders to create one (Michna, 2013: 198). As Eugeniusz Mironowicz writes in his report on the analysis of Interior Ministry documents: "In People's Poland, the Lemko problem emerged in 1956, when representatives of a sizable portion of the community, hitherto accepted as Ukrainians, began to make demands on the part of the party authorities to recognize them as a separate nationality and to demand the right to have their own organization" (Mironowicz, 2000: 182).

However, the Temporary Social and Educational Committee of Rusyn-Lemkos, established in 1955 did not gain acceptance from the authorities, who pursued a policy that favored the preservation of the national unity of the Ukrainian and Lemkos communities. Documents of the Ministry of Internal Affairs indicate that the authorities supported mainly the Lemkos' initiatives, supporting the party's position that Lemkos are an ethnographic group of the Ukrainian nation (Mironowicz, 2000: 185).

¹ Priests also sought to go to America (Dudra, 2004: 5).

² Article 13 of the Declaration states: "Every person has the right to leave any country, including his own" (Wiśniewski, 1997).

Since 1956, the Ukrainian Social and Cultural Society (UTSK) had existed, but in the long run it was supported only by the Ukrainophile Lemkos. Despite the unfavorable socio-political situation in Poland, Lemkos undertook further activities to emphasize the national distinctiveness of this community. In 1969, they established a Song and Dance Ensemble “Łemkowyna” in Bielanka near Gorlice. It consisted of Lemkos living both in Lemkivshchyna and in the Western Territories of Poland. Since 1979, annual meetings ‘by the fire’ had been organized in Michałów near Legnica. The activity of Lemkos and the carnival of Solidarity contributed to the attempt to establish the Lemko Culture Lovers Society in 1982. Ultimately, due to the lack of support from the state authorities and the reluctance of Ukrainian circles, this attempt failed (Dudra, 2013a: 100, 104-106).

Organizational activity of Lemkos in the USA after World War II

Lemkos started to emigrate to the USA in large numbers as early as the end of the 19th century. They established parishes, brotherhoods and finally organizations. Even before World War II, two of the most important ones were founded: the pro-Russian Lemko Association (Lemko-Soyuz) and the pro-Ukrainian Organization for the Defense of Lemkivshchyna in America (OOL). Lemkos of different national identities were, thus, able to find support abroad. Moreover, these organizations represented Lemko interests in political and cultural issues, which was much easier in the democratic United States than in the ‘old country’.

Lemko-Soyuz at its peak, in 1945, had 5,000 members in 100 branches (88 in the United States and 12 in Canada). During World War II, the organization additionally found itself in a favorable situation, as it could officially support both the USA and the USSR, which were fighting as allies against Germany (Lemko Association of USA and Canada, 1979: 23). It, then, encouraged all Lemko emigrants to stand in solidarity with the Red Army. The OOL, on the other hand, suspended its official activities due to the wartime relations of Ukrainians with Germany. The OOL activity was renewed in 1957, thus, the Ukrainophile Lemkos received support from 16 branches of the organization, located in various cities of the United States. It should be emphasized that the activists were involved in the life of their community also in the years when the OOL activity was suspended, but the lack of official structures significantly limited their actions.

American activists were rarely given the opportunity to come to the ‘old country’. In 1957, permission from the Polish authorities to come to Poland was obtained by Peter S. Hardy, leader of the Lemko Relief Organization (LRO), associated with the Lemko-Soyuz (Hardy, Fedoronko, 1957: 3). He and other delegates – Father Josyf Fedoronko and Nykolaj Cysliak, the editor of *Karpatska Rus* (the organization’s press organ) – spent eight days in Poland and then went to Moscow to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the outbreak of the October Revolution (*Председатель Лемковського Реліфа, ПемроС*, 1957: 1). The purpose of the delegation was to negotiate an agreement with the Polish

authorities on providing material aid to the Lemko population. 'Hardy's delegation' established contacts with Lemko activists residing in the Western Territories (Zwoliński, 1994: 85-110). The promise of help from American Lemkos mobilized part of the community to return to Lemkivshchyna. The newcomers from the USA also presented the Polish officials with visions of building a hospital and creating from scratch two villages in Gorlice powiat. The agreement was concluded on October 14, 1959. The composition of the advisory commission to the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare for the implementation of the agreement Lemko Relief Committee was also established.

This cooperation was supposed to open the borders for more to activists from Poland and America and enable them to act directly on both continents, as well as to create foundations for more numerous Lemko emigration. However, these plans were realized only to a small extent. Not all Lemkos – including those from Poland – supported Hardy's initiative. However, as Jacek Nowak notes, his help was proof that the Lemko diaspora strived to maintain and strengthen contacts with their homeland (Nowak, 2000: 180-181). Lemko-Soyuz tried to expand its influence among Lemkos in Poland and Ukraine, but it did not have much impact on them because contact with the 'old country' was limited, and events like the one in 1963, when an official Lemko-Soyuz delegation came to Poland to unveil a monument to Lemko partisans in Uście Gorlickie, were rare. The Lemko cultural activities were supported financially at that time. Similar donations were still made in 1968 (Horbal, 2010: 292; Tyda, 2012: 98).

In the second half of the 1960s, thanks to two pro-Rusyn Lemko-Soyuz activists, Stefan Kyczura and Teodor Dokla, the resettlement of Lemkos was criticized more directly and their return to Lemkivshchyna was openly demanded. *Karpatska Rus* changed its political line for some time and moved away from pro-communist propaganda. It undermined the ideas of the pro-communist orientation of the organization and commented unfavorably on the actions of the authorities in the USSR and Poland concerning, among other things, the policy of national assimilation of Lemkos and Ukrainianization of Rusyns in Czechoslovakia. Often in the magazine, both leaders blamed the Polish and Czechoslovak authorities for the denationalization of Lemkos. They demanded that the Lemko issue be raised at the international forum. They also got in touch with OOL and together they created the World Lemkos' Federation (WLF). Its aim was (without focusing on the political differences of its members) to strive for the return of Lemkos to Lemkivshchyna and to grant them full ownership of their native lands. This policy met with opposition from conservative, older emigrants (Lemko Association of USA and Canada, 1979: 10).

OOL activists also created the Lemko Research Foundation (LRF) in 1976, which was to deal with educational activities. In 1981, they also organized a Lemko museum in Stamford (Tyda, 2018).

Lemko emigration to the USA after World War II

It was difficult to obtain permission not only to come from the USA to Poland, but also to travel in the opposite direction. In 1952, the Ministry of Public Security issued passports for private travel to only about 50 people³. The scale of Lemko emigration from Poland after 1945 is difficult to study. Only fragmentary data are available. According to one piece of information concerning only the province of Koszalin, from there in the years 1956-1964 only 292 people were supposed to emigrate 'to the West'. In other information from the same area, we learn that "by 1970 about 1,000 people had left our area for various capitalist countries" (AIPNSz, 00102/65, t. 2, k. 72). Emigration occurred during waves of political crises, such as the Prague Spring and the birth of Solidarity in Poland. Especially intensive exodus of Lemkos from Poland took place in the 1980s. It was then that mainly very young people left the country. Jarosław Syrnyk also mentions leading activists of the UTSK: Roman Szporluk, Mirosław Truchan, Olga Wasylków, Maksymilian Maślej, Jarosław Kryk and Irena Tymoczko-Kamińska (Syrnyk, 2008: 22). Some emigrants returned to their hometowns. The reasons for such a decision may have been the longing for their loved ones, inability to find themselves in a foreign country, or the desire to become socially and politically active in their hometowns.

Between 1986 and 1989, almost 130,000 people emigrated, the vast majority of them still as economic emigrants, but at the same time as political emigrants. The emigrants were young people, well-prepared professionally, who saw no future for themselves in the political conditions of the time. Some of them returned to the country after the fall of the communist party rule (Wrzesiński, 2006: 171).

Citizens of the People's Republic of Poland (including Lemkos) looked for various ways to settle in the USA. Some of them fled to Italy, Greece, Scandinavia, Turkey, Yugoslavia, West Germany and Austria. There they were placed in refugee camps, where they were able to obtain visas to Australia, Canada, or the United States with relative ease. In addition, a total of over 530,000 of 5.7 million temporary departures to capitalist countries recorded between 1983 and 1988 did not return, and hundreds of thousands of others returned much later than they declared in their passport applications. At that time, only 83,000 people received permission to emigrate legally, but they accounted for only about a dozen percent of all those leaving the country. Illegal emigration became the mainstream of the outflow. According to the registers of destination countries, legal emigration from Poland between 1981 and 1989 amounted to 766,000

³ In total, the Ministry of Public Security issued passports for only 12,000 trips abroad in 1952. However, they were received mostly by trusted party activists and officials travelling on official business to other countries in the Soviet bloc: "Poland was a closed country. It was separated from the world by a barbed wire fence over 2,000 km long, 130 guard towers and a strip of land over 3,000 km long. Moreover, the borders were guarded by 30,000 soldiers of the Border Guard Army, who were ordered to shoot anyone trying to escape" (Stola, 2010: 10).

in West Germany, 77,000 in the USA, 65,000 in Canada (Trzcielińska-Polus, 1997: 45; Sakson, 2002: 97, 193; Okólski, 2004: 211).

The period of political transformation in Poland

The social and political transformation initiated by the elections of June 1989 changed the situation of national and ethnic minorities. The new authorities abandoned the myth propagated by the People's Republic of Poland about a uniform ethnic structure of the country. The issue of minorities in the new situation was brought to the forefront and the minorities themselves could publicly and freely formulate their goals and aspirations. One of the first steps by the authorities to empower national and ethnic minorities was to relinquish supervision by the Ministry of the Interior and transfer their rights to the Ministry of Culture and Art. The new law on associations, introduced in April 1989, was also beneficial to minorities. The removal of restrictions on their registration gave representatives of minorities the opportunity to act freely. The period of political transformation in Poland also activated the Lemkos, who also took advantage of these changes to formalize and develop their activities. After 1989, several Lemko initiatives emerged that led to the creation of new independent organizations (Michna, 2013: 200).

The first postwar Lemko organization was the Lemko Association. Its founding meeting took place on February, 5 1989 in Legnica. Andrzej Kopcza became the chairman. The main goal of the Association was the integration of Lemkos regardless of their views and religious beliefs, nurturing, development and popularization of Lemko' spiritual and material culture, teaching Lemko language, popularization of Lemkos' history and knowledge about their life and activities abroad (Stowarzyszenie Łemków, 2013). The Lemko Association was – together with the Rusyn Revival (Slovakia), Society of Carpathian Rusyns (Ukraine), the Rusyn Motherland (Yugoslavia-Vojvodina) and joint delegation of Rusyn organizations from the USA and Canada – the initiator of convening the World Congress of Rusyns. The first was held in Medzilaborce (March 22-23, 1991). During it, the World Council of Rusyns was elected. It consisted of Vasyl Turok-Hetesz from Slovakia (chairman) and council members: Andrzej Kopcza (Poland), Lubomir Medeszi (Yugoslavia), Vasyl Soczka (Ukraine) and Paul R. Magocsi (USA and Canada). The last mentioned is one of the main ideologists of the Carpathian movement (Magocsi, 1987; 1988; Dudra, 2008: 215). He consistently introduces the term Carpathian Rusyns into public circulation. This theory is met with criticism from the Ukrainian option.

As a counterbalance for Lemkos Association on December 30, 1989 the Ukrainophiles created in Gorlice their own organization – Union of Lemkos. Teodor Gocz became its chairman. The aim of the organization was, among others, to integrate Lemkos dispersed on the territory of Poland. The organization preached about respecting Lemkos' rights regardless of their religious affiliation or whether they defined themselves as Lemkos or Lemkos-Ukrainians. With the registration of the Union of Lemkos, a rival-

ry between two opposing national orientations began (Duć-Fajfer, 1991: 30). It intensified after taking over Lemko Watra⁴ in Żdynia by Ukrainian option (Dudra, 2008: 216). Thus, the conflict between the Rusyn and Ukrainian organizations, which had escalated in the second half of the 20th century in North America, intensified on the Polish ground. Both groups tried to establish contacts with American emigrants to seek their political and economic support.

Apart from the organizations mentioned above, there were also other initiatives associating Lemkos. Among the most important are: Rusyn Democratic Lemkos Circle "Hospodar", Association "Ruska Bursa", Association of Dance and Song Ensemble "Kyczera", Association of Lemkos' Culture Lovers in Strzelce Krajeńskie, Association for Development of Lemkos' Culture Museum in Zyndranowa, Foundation for Support of Lemkos' Minority "Rutenika", Association "Terka Karpacka", Association of Lemkos' Youth "Czuha". After 1989, Lemko organizational life underwent dynamic development and natural process of pluralization (Dudra, 2013b: 256).

There were also attempts to consolidate all Lemko organizations. In 1995, an initiative was put forward to establish Federation of Lemko organizations. However, despite common goals and several meetings, the federation did not come into being. Despite the existing organizational fragmentation, the activity of Lemko associations fulfils important integrative and educational functions (Dudra, 2013b: 286).

Lemkos' activity in the USA after 1989

In the 1990s, Polish citizens began to take advantage of the so-called visa lottery, which made it much easier for them to emigrate. After organizational structures were created, they quickly tried to establish contacts with groups of American emigrants. The jobs that the emigrants in the United States pursued at that time were varied, but for the most part they belonged to the so-called inferior segment of the labor market – low-paid physical work, often difficult and dirty, monotonous and short-lived, sometimes dangerous – jobs that the locals considered the least attractive. They were mostly employed illegally, which affected their working conditions and pay, and they had no insurance. All this made them vulnerable to the employer and led to exploitation. The emigrants usually did not have much choice within the lower segment either, especially when they did not speak the language, which was the case for most of them. Getting a job usually depended on the social networks they had access to (Stola, 2010: 358, 369-370).

American activists also had to find their way in the new political circumstances. When the Soviet Union collapsed, not only did the ideological base of Lemko-Soyuz fall into ruin, but also its financial base. The USSR authorities used the Lemko organization for

⁴ Watra has been taking place in the Lemkivshchyna area since 1982. It is a three-day festival during which all fields of Lemko culture are presented: folklore, music, material art. Guests of this event are often Lemkos from North America (Dudra, 2008: 209).

propaganda purposes while supporting it financially. It was difficult for the leaders to find themselves in the new reality without money from the Kremlin and with the necessity to reevaluate their political aspirations. Paul J. Best points out that Lemko-Soyuz was also unable to present its activists with an attractive offer of self-help; it did not create an insurance or credit fund. All these factors resulted in the fact that in the 1990s a few hundred members remained from several thousand. Their number was ten times smaller than in the organization's glory years (Best, 2009: 29, 34). OOL found itself in a much better position than Lemko-Soyuz during the period of political transition in Eastern Europe. The anti-Moscow stance of the Ukrainianophile organization allowed it to remain credible and continue to fight for the interests of Ukraine.

Under new political circumstances, the Carpatho-Rusyn Society (C-RS) was founded in the United States. It took place in 1994 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. John Righetti became the president of this non-profit organization at that time. Until 2007, C-RS, together with the Andy Warhol Museum, has organized a festival dedicated to the artist. In honor of Warhol, smaller events are also organized, such as lectures that examine the influence of his background on his work (Rusinko, 2012). In 2004, the society purchased the building (built in 1903) of the former John the Baptist Cathedral in Munhall, Pennsylvania and established the National Carpatho-Rusyn Cultural Center there. At that time, the Society had about 1,700 members and 10 branches (Arizona, Cleveland, Lake Erie, Lake Michigan, National Capital, DC, Eastern Pennsylvania, New England, New Jersey, New York, Pittsburgh, and Youngstown/Warren) (Carpatho-Rusyn Society, 2013).

Another manifestation of Lemko emigration activity was the creation of the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center. Its agenda was to promote the Rusyn revival in the USA. However, with the growing importance of the organization and the first signs of political change in Europe, they began to seek to gain influence over events on the 'old continent'. Paul Robert Magocsi unequivocally declared that the Center's activities should be geared to ethnic agitation and to the promotion of a particular national identity. At the same time, he rejected accusations about the political-ideological character of its activities. Although columnists publishing in the organization's organ declared their willingness to present diverse texts and information in its pages, most of the materials expressed pro-Rusyn national aspirations. In 2009, the Carpatho-Rusyn Consortium of North America was formed. Its organizations included: Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, C-RS, the Minneapolis-based Rusyn Association, the Rusyn Association of North America from Kitchener, Ontario, the Rusyn-Saskatchewan Ruthenian Association from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, the World Academy of Rusyn Culture from Toronto, and Lemko-Soyuz. In addition, the WLF continued to function. The OOL is an organization that no longer publishes many books at the present time, but it maintains the publication of *Lemkivshchyna* and continues to do charitable work. The activists are absorbed by the current political situation in Ukraine (Organization for the Defense of Lemkivshchyna, 2013) and the maintenance of the museum in Stamford. Every year,

they put a lot of effort into organizing another edition of Watra in Ellenville, which has become a symbol of their activity and the best excuse to meet and keep their traditions brought to the USA from Lemkivshchyna. The activists realize that the existence of the organization is indispensable for the maintenance of the Lemko tradition, but also for the vitality of the ideas concerning individual national identities.

Conclusions

Both in Poland and in the USA Lemkos tried to cultivate their traditions. In the USA however, Lemkos diaspora was not restricted by the government, so it could organize itself and develop its activities. In Poland, on the other hand, after World War II, Lemkos were not allowed to form their organization, the Orthodox Church had a weak position and the Greek Catholic Church was considered non-existent. That is why the collapse of the Eastern Bloc was so important: in Poland it opened many new opportunities, and it also facilitated contact between activists from Poland and America. In the USA, moreover, the new political reality verified the earlier political sympathies among the representatives of given organizations, discrediting them or raising their rank. The organizations, both Polish and American, in their multifaceted activity still contribute to consolidation and preservation of Lemkos' cultural identity and preservation of their traditions. Implementation of many projects in Poland and North America by these organizations contributed to passing down the heritage to the next generations of Lemkos.

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Abstract: During the communist period, the Lemko community did not have its own separate ethnic organization in Poland. In the USA, the Lemkos were able to conduct social and political activities without any obstacles. Even before World War II, two important organizations were established: the Russophile Lemko-Soyuz and the Ukrainophile Organization for the Defense of Lemkivshchyna in America. The social and political transformation initiated by the elections of June 1989 changed the situation of national and ethnic minorities. The period of political transformation in Poland also activated the Lemkos, who also took advantage of these changes to formalize and develop their activities. The first postwar Lemko organization was the Lemko Association. As a counterbalance for Lemkos Association, Ukrainophiles created in Gorlice their own organization – Union of Lemkos. American activists also had to find their way in the new political circumstances. When the Soviet Union collapsed, not only did the ideological base of Lemko-Soyuz fall into ruin, but also its financial base. OOL found itself in a much better position than Lemko-Soyuz during the period of political transition in Eastern Europe. The anti-Moscow stance of the Ukrainianophile organization allowed it to remain credible and continue to fight for the interests of Ukraine. However, the organizations, both Polish and American, in their multifaceted activity still contribute to consolidation and preservation of Lemkos' cultural identity and preservation of their traditions.

Keywords: Lemkos, emigration, diaspora, Poland, United States of America

Article submitted: 20.04.2021; article accepted: 30.06.2021.

