



Hungarian National Minority of Ukraine: Legal and Practical Aspects of Realisation of Minority Rights

Mihály Tóth, C.Sc.

Senior Research Fellow, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine

Institute of State and Law by V.M.Koretsky, Kiev

E-mail: tothmihaly@meta.ua

Abstract. The Hungarian community which lives in Ukraine transformed into a national minority as a result of the creation of a series of nation states on the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after World War I. The Hungarian minority in Ukraine is relatively small (156.2 thousand people) but at the same time a regional national community (92% live in the Transcarpathian region) and the least integrated (assimilated) minority (95,4% of Hungarians think that their mother tongue is the language of their nationality). Despite the fact that this minority is one of the most active and successful in the rate of realisation of its rights, anxiety and concern in the Hungarian community are the negative trends which describe the socio-economic and political-cultural situation in Ukraine.

Keywords: Hungarian minority, minority rights, Ukrainian law

I. Numbers and peculiar properties

According to the census data from 2001, in Ukraine there were 156.6 thousand citizens who considered themselves to be ethnic Hungarians, that is only 0.3% of the total population.

Table No 1. According to the census data, the population of Ukraine amounted to 48.2 million citizens in 2001, which is divided into several groups according to the criterion of nationality.

The most numerous nationality	Thousand	%		Year 2001/1989, correlative to, %
		Year 2001	Year 1989	
Ukrainians	37541.7	77.8	72.7	100.3
Russians	8334.1	17.3	22.1	73.4
Belarusians	275.8	0.6	0.9	62.7
Moldovans	258.6	0.5	0.6	79.7
Crimean Tatars	248.2	0.5	0.0	5.3 x more
Bulgarians	204.6	0.4	0.5	87.5
Hungarians	156.6	0.3	0.4	96.0
Romanians	151.0	0.3	0.3	112.0
Poles	144.1	0.3	0.4	65.8
Jews	103.6	0.2	0.9	21.3

Table No 2. The number of citizens of Hungarian nationality in Ukraine and Transcarpathia

Year of Census	In Ukraine, thousand	% in relation to the total number of Ukrainian citizens	In Transcarpathia distr., thousand	% of the total population
1979			158.4	13.7
1989	164.2	0.4	155.7	12.5
2001	156.6	0.3	151.5	12.1

The above tables show that among the total population of Ukraine ethnic Hungarians get the sixth place on the basis of their number. And it can also be seen that during the period between two censuses (1989 and 2001), within an overall decrease of the population, the number of Hungarians decreased proportionately (from 0.4% to 0.3%, that is 0.1 %) as well as in absolute figures (from 164.2 thousand to 156.6 thousand). From Table 2. it turns out that the Hungarians in Ukraine, in their absolute majority, over 97%, live in the Transcarpathian region.

The data mentioned previously give us ground to assert that the Hungarian minority in Ukraine is relatively small but at the same time a regional national community. Moreover, within the Transcarpathian region, it is also a regional minority due to the fact that its overwhelming majority, over 92% of Hungarians

living in the area (almost 150 thousand people), is concentrated in 124 settlements (609 is the total number of the settlements in the Carpathian area) which are situated in a strip of about 20 km wide along Ukraine's border with Slovakia, Hungary and Romania. Transcarpathian Hungarians live mostly in rural areas, only 36% are urban residents.

An important feature of the Hungarian minority is their low level of assimilation and integration into Ukrainian society. This fact is demonstrated by the latest census figures, according to which 95.4% of Hungarians think that their mother tongue is the language of their nationality, and 60.1% stated, that they know no other language except for Hungarian.

II. Historical aspect

The Hungarian community which lives in Ukraine transformed into a national minority as a result of the creation of a series of nation states on the territory of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after World War I. The current territory of the Transcarpathian region was included into the Czechoslovak Republic as a result of the Paris Peace Treaties. As a result of the First Vienna Arbitration (in November 1938) and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia (in March 1939) this territory was included (partially annexed) into the Hungarian Kingdom. In July 1945 (the date when the treaty between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union was signed) it was attached to the Soviet Union, having the status of the Transcarpathian region of Ukrainian SSR since January 1946.

The most tragic page in the history of Transcarpathian Hungarians opens with the arrival of the fronts of World War II. According to the order of command of the 4th Ukrainian Front, all the men of Hungarian and German nationality of military service age were deported. This campaign covered around 40 thousand people, nearly half of whom died a martyr's death in Stalin's camps.

Ukrainian Hungarians, like all other inhabitants of the Ukrainian SSR became citizens of the independent Ukraine in December 1991.

The uniqueness of the historical destiny of this minority, just like of all the inhabitants of Transcarpathia, is that they happened to become citizens of 5 states during the 20th century. Due to the adoption of the Hungarian Law on the simplified naturalisation of former citizens, some long-lived persons would have a possibility to receive their sixth citizenship without leaving their native land.

III. Implementing minority rights

Considering the rate of realisation of its rights, the Hungarian minority is perhaps one of the most active and successful national communities of Ukraine. Such activity becomes obvious to those who visit the settlements in which Hungarians form the majority or give a substantial portion of the population. As a result of local referendums and decisions of the local and central government, a significant part of such settlements were given back their historical – Hungarian – names during the period after the proclamation of independence, when changes occurred in the social and political structure (1991). Public inscriptions such as road signs, street name signs, signs on the walls of official buildings, departments, agencies, as well as advertising signs and announcements usually use Hungarian language. Hungarian national flags are hung near the Ukrainian flag on official buildings.

Due to the compact structure of the settlements, the vast majority of the Transcarpathian Hungarians are brought up and taught in their native language. Thus, in 2008 and 2009 representatives of national minorities had the opportunity to meet their educational needs in 80 pre-schools and 97 schools with the enrollment of 16.4 thousand students. Graduates of these schools have the opportunity to pursue higher education fully or partially in their native tongue at the Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute and at the Hungarian Language Department of Uzhgorod National University, where in total more than 1.8 thousand graduates of Hungarian-language schools are taught.

Significant role in the preservation and development of national, cultural and linguistic identity of Transcarpathian Hungarians belongs to the church, to social, cultural and human rights protection organisations, as well as to the numerous historical and architectural monuments that the Transcarpathian region is so rich in.

Special mention should be given to human rights and political activity inside this community. The interests of Hungarians on both local and state levels are represented by dozens of public organisations, among which the Hungarian Cultural Federation in Transcarpathia (the short name is CHCT – Kárpátaljai Magyar Kulturális Szövetség – KMKSZ) and the Hungarian Democratic Federation in Ukraine, the most numerous ones. There are parties created by them, respectively: the Hungarian Party in Ukraine-KMKSZ and the Hungarian Democratic Party in Ukraine (only these two parties are formed on a national basis in the country). Due to the activity of these parties the Hungarian minority is represented in local and regional councils in proportion to its number. The main programmatic goals of these unions are the promotion of the representatives of the Hungarian national minority, the realisation of the right to the national and cultural autonomy for all Hungarians in Ukraine in spite of their place of living, and also the national and territorial autonomy in the places where this minority

lives in compact units. These rights are provided by the national legislation and the international commitments made by Ukraine.

An active policy of Hungary in supporting the Hungarian minorities abroad plays a significant role in successfully promoting the development policy of the Hungarian minority of Ukraine. The establishment and activities of a number of cultural and educational institutions such as the Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian Institute, the Illyés Gyula Hungarian Regional Theatre of Transcarpathia, a series of comprehensive high schools might be impossible without the support of the “motherland”. Thanks to the support of the Hungarian government and to that of non-governmental foundations and organisations, projects on monuments, publishing of periodicals and literature was made possible, as well as the accomplishment of various activities aimed at the support and development of the national and cultural identity of Hungarians in Ukraine.

IV. Problems and challenges at the beginning of the 21st century

Despite these achievements, anxiety and concern in the Hungarian community are the negative trends which describe the socio-economic and political-cultural situation in Ukraine.

The worsening of the economic situation, the high unemployment rate, the low salaries, compared to neighbouring states, as well as poor social security have contributed to the increase of emigration tendencies. Emigration, together with a sharp decrease in fertility and with high mortality rates, predicts a significant decrease in the number of ethnic Hungarians in Ukrainian society. Experts predict that should the current trend remain, the number of Hungarians in Ukraine would be less than 100 thousand people in 2050.

Some innovations made by the Ministry of Science and Education of Ukraine aimed at the maintenance of the Ukrainian language in educational processes had a negative impact on the situation and development of some educational establishments where Hungarian-language education is provided. For example, a decision that the entry examinations to higher education institutions can be taken exclusively in Ukrainian language significantly reduced the number of people willing to learn in schools where Hungarian is the language of education.

Anti-Hungarian, xenophobic manifestations, which have appeared in the recent years, are of particular concern. These manifestations are regular and result in the desecration of monuments related to Hungarian history and culture, appear in publishing and in the form of public statements in which Hungarians are described as enemies of the Ukrainian people, and Transcarpathian Hungarians as the offspring of former invaders, colonists.

Literature

FEDINEC, Cs.–VEHES, M. 2010. *Transcarpathia in 1919–2009. History, Politics, Culture*. Uzhgorod.

The Development of Humanitarian Cooperation in the Ukrainian-Hungarian Border Region: Analysis, Evaluation. Uzhgorod, 2011.

LYZANETS, P. M. 1998. *Hungarian Minority in Transcarpathia*. Uzhgorod.