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A COLLECTION OF PAPERS
IZ ISTORIJE VOJVODANSKIH RUSINA DO 1941. GODINE
(from the history of Vojvodinian Ruthenians until 1941)

Abstract: The history of the Ruthenians (Rusyns) in Southern Hungary, later in Yugoslavia, was in the focus not only of the authors who were members of this national community, but also of Hungarian, Ukrainian and Yugoslav scholars and historians. In the socialist Yugoslavia the most significant contribution to the historiography of the Ruthenians in the Serbian language was the project of the Institute of History of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina – the papers of five historians with five different themes which are chronologically linked under a common title *Iz istorije vojvodanskih Rusina do 1941. godine* (*From the History of Vojvodinian Ruthenians until 1941*), published in the Almanac of the Society of Historians of Vojvodina in 1977. Although it has been more than four decades since the publication of this collection of papers, it has still not been critically presented and assessed. We think it makes sense and justification to present this work, even after long delays, at least in a basic outline, to show how much and in which direction it pushed the limits of new knowledge and to draw the attention of future researchers to some shortcomings, anachronistic and ideologically motivated attitudes and obvious material mistakes.

Keywords: Ruthenians in Southern Hungary/Yugoslavia, historiography of Ruthenians, Slavko Gavrilović, Branislav Vranešević, Arpad Lebl, Nikola Gaćeša, Milenko Palić.

In the socialist Yugoslavia the first comprehensive and significant work dedicated to the history of the Ruthenians who lived in this region in the Serbian language is a collection of papers – five topics of five historians from the Institute of History of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. This work was published under the common title *Iz istorije vojvodanskih Rusina do 1941. godine* (*From the History of Vojvodinian Ruthenians until 1941*). It was the result of a project assigned to the Institute of History by the Regional Committee of the Communist Union of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The authors of the papers are: Slavko Gavrilović (Gavrilović), Branislav Vranešević (Vranešević), Arpad Lebl (Lebl), Nikola Gaćeša (Gaćeša) and Milenko Palić (Palić). The work of Slavko Gavrilović has already been assessed in another article and here we are going to emphasize only the most basic and important details. His paper titled „Rusini u

Bačkoj i Sremu od sredine XVIII do sredine XIX veka“ (The Ruthenians of Bačka and Srem from mid 18th to mid 19th Century) is the most comprehensive one in this collection and stands out in its studiousness. It is based on extensive archival material and relevant literature and is unavoidable in any further research of this period of the history of Ruthenians (Ramač 2009).

Branislav Vranešević's paper „Rusini u borbi za nacionalni opstanak 1848 – 1890“ (Ruthenians in the Struggle for National Survival 1848-1890)¹ chronologically follows the research of S. Gavrilović. Unlike previous Ruthenian researchers, Vranešević tried to see the cultural and educational life of the Ruthenians in Southern Hungary in a wider context because the Ruthenians/Ukrainians in the Habsburg Monarchy/Austria-Hungary lived in three separate regions: their smallest community was in Southern Hungary (in 1848 there were 8,500, in 1910 – 20,000 inhabitants); a significantly bigger community lived in Northeastern Hungary (in 1850 there were 217,000, in 1910 – 324,00 inhabitants); the biggest community lived in Galicia (in 1851 there were 2,3 million, in 1910 – 3,6 million inhabitants). For these three communities of Ruthenians/Ukrainians the following ethnonym was used in its three variants: Ruthenians, Rutének, Rusyns, whereas the Ruthenians in Galicia started using the ethnonym Ukrainians in the 1870s. B. Vranešević's attempt to show cultural and educational issues and processes of the Ruthenians in Southern Hungary in a broader Ruthenian/Ukrainian context is completely justifiable and methodologically only correct because it enables a complex assessment, evaluation and understanding of common issues, similarities and differences which existed in the overall economic and social life of the three territorially and politically separated communities of the same nation. On the other hand, Vranešević looks at Ruthenians in Southern Hungary not as an isolated nation, but in a broader context of social and economical relations with other nations with whom they lived. Certainly, sometimes lacking relevant historical sources, the author describes the life of the Ruthenian community and some processes in it using analogy and a broader framework of social and economic circumstances, which is a rather general and insufficiently convincing view, or he even makes certain mistakes.

Vranešević writes about Ruthenian schools in the second half of the 19th century relying less on archival material and more on the literature published in Ruthenian Calendars (*Руски календар*), which were published by the Ruthenian National Educational Society in the period between the two world wars². Referring to several sources, mostly to literature, the author is sometimes not cautious and critical enough and he gives misleading information or attitudes which are in mutual collision. For instance, he states that during the era of absolutism provisory church funds were used for maintaining Ruthenian confessional schools, or in other words, that the church collected from its followers money for maintaining these schools and that it arranged schoolrooms and maintained schoolteachers³, while available historical sources show that Ruthenian confessional schools in Kerestur, Kocur and other settlements were maintained by political municipalities, i.e. the Ruthenian community in the places where Ruthenians lived together with members of other national

¹ Vranešević 1977.

² Kostel'nyk 1926; Polyvka 1933; 1934.

³ Vranešević 1977: 240-241.

communities. The representatives of the church only supervised the work of these schools and the Diocese of Križevci (Eparchy) was competent for the appointment and dismissal of teachers⁴. The author wrongfully states that Petro and Aleksandar Kuzmjak were brothers⁵. Aleksandar was the son of a much more famous Petro Kuzmjak. Another author's statement that was not true was that the teacher Mihajlo Vrabelj from the confessional school in Ruski Kerestur returned to Hornjica, where he became the editor of the newspaper *Недѣля*. Namely, M. Vrabelj worked less at the confessional school in Ruski Kerestur and more as a teacher at confessional Ruthenian schools and as a church chanter at Greek Catholic parishes first in Stari Verbasi and then in Novi Sad, wherefrom he went to Budapest in 1898 and became the editor of the already mentioned newspaper⁶.

In some details Vranešević did not clearly understand the difference in the position of the Ruthenians in Hungary and Galicia in the second half of the 19th century. He incorrectly states that *Зоря Галицка* was a magazine of the Ruthenians from Zakarpatje (Subcarpathian Region)⁷, while it was published in Galicia, in Lviv. Neither did he see clearly the differences in the role and influence of the Ruthenians from the Subcarpathian Region and the Ruthenians/Ukrainians in Galicia on the national revival of the Ruthenians in Southern Hungary⁸. Namely, while the cultural, educational and national life of the Ruthenians/Ukrainians in Galicia in the second half of the 19th century was in strong rise, the Ruthenians in the Subcarpathian Region were taken by a strong wave of Magyarization which to a certain point paralyzed their national life.

Vranešević noticed well the problem of forming the literary (official) language of the Ruthenians in Hungary after the revolution of 1848/1849, which was not solved until the disintegration of Austria-Hungary. In that period there was a lot of wandering and uncertainties in using the literary language. The attempts to use one of the dialects of the Ruthenian language spoken in Hungary as its base, supplemented by the elements of Church Slavonic and literary Russian language, did not give the expected results. Literary works of enduring artistic value were not written in that mixed language and it did not become the initiator of the national revival of Ruthenians. The codification of the literary language of the Ruthenians in Southern Hungary/Yugoslavia was totally different. It was proven by history that only a live dialect, in which Havrijil Kosteljnič started writing and publishing his poetry at the beginning of the 20th century, had the chance to survive.

Vranešević was the first scholar in the historiography of Ruthenians in Southern Hungary to notice and indicate the links and contacts of Ruthenians in Hungary, especially of their school youth with school/student youth of other Slavic nations in Budapest, as well as with Hungarian Serbs, referring to the literary work *My Memories* written by Teodor Stefanović Vilovski⁹. Yet, these individual contacts of the new Ruthenian intelligentsia were not sufficient for the establishment of stronger links between the Ruthenians in Hungary with the representatives of other non-Hungarian nations until the agreement of 1867 and

⁴ Ramač 2007: passim.

⁵ Vranešević 1977: 234

⁶ Ramač 2007: passim.

⁷ Vranešević 1977: 225.

⁸ Vranešević 1977: 236.

⁹ Vranešević 1977: 244-245

particularly after it, when the pressure of the government against the legitimate national requirements of non-Hungarian nations was growing stronger. Vranešević indicates that at that time the Ruthenians in Hungary neither had a political life that was sufficiently developed nor any real power that would match and join the political actions of the representatives of other non-Hungarian nations.

Up to the end of the 19th century Hungarian Ruthenians did not take part in any common political actions of the representatives of the minority communities in Hungary in the struggle for national rights of their nations, but the representatives of some Ruthenian regions sent individual petitions, memorandums and requests to the competent authorities. At the assembly of the Greek Catholic clergy of Zemplin County equality was requested for all the nationalities of Hungary, as well as for the Ruthenians: the use of the blue-yellow Ruthenian (Ukrainian) national flag; the right to submit applications to the authorities in the Ruthenian language; the appointment of the officers who spoke the Ruthenian language; the request for rounding up counties along ethnic lines; to use the Ruthenian language at the county assemblies in the counties where the Ruthenians made up the majority and to translate into the Ruthenian language all the government regulations etc. Next came the requests for the autonomy of the Uniate Church and the raising of the Eparchy of Mukačevo into the rank of archbishopric; for the opening of schools in the national Ruthenian language and for founding spiritual seminaries and teachers' colleges in Prešov. Hungarian authorities ignored all these requests and instead of the ethnonym "Ruthenian" they started using more often the confessional name "the Uniate Hungarians" or "the Uniate nation" to show that the Ruthenians in Hungary were not the same people as the Ruthenians/Ukrainians from the other side of the Carpathian Region¹⁰. He illustrates how the Hungarian authorities hindered the work of the Society of Saint Vasilij the Great, which published books and text books in the Ruthenian language: using the authority mechanisms people of pro-Hungarian orientation were placed at the head of the society. They were slowly extinguishing its activities in the preservation and development of the cultural, educational and national life of that national community until its final extinction¹¹.

Vranešević well noted that the disunity of the Ruthenian intelligentsia was the biggest obstacle in creating a stronger National Front. The biggest part of the Ruthenian intelligentsia in Hungary was of pro-Hungarian orientation, another part was of pro-Russian orientation, a part was of pro-Ukrainian orientation and in favor of a closer cooperation with the Ruthenians/Ukrainians of Galicia, whereas a part of the so called "pro-national" orientation did not have a clear concept and program. Vranešević was the first Yugoslav historian who recognized the significant role of the Ruthenians/Ukrainians of Galicia on the cultural, educational and national revival of the Ruthenians in Southern Hungary, following it from the founding of libraries in the 1870s, through sending books, newspapers and magazines, publishing the notes of V. Hnatjuk on the Ruthenians and printing the first literary work of H. Kosteljnjk. On the other hand, he clearly noticed the attempts of the Hungarian authorities in discouraging all these contacts and thwarting the formation of the awareness of the national similarity and unity of the two Ruthenian communities.

¹⁰ Vranešević 1977: 228-229.

¹¹ Vranešević 1977: 229.

Vranešević briefly shows the significance of the work of Ivan Franko, Volodimir Hnatjuk, Mihajlo Pavlik and others in raising the national awareness not only in the Ruthenians/Ukrainians in Galicia, but in the Ruthenians of Southern Hungary as well¹². He cites the letters of young Ruthenian intellectuals and peasants from Bačka sent to Volodimir Hnatjuk, in which they expressed their national awareness and their views on their ethnicity, on life and needs of this national community, on the danger coming from Magyarization, or the assurance that only stronger links with the Ruthenians/Ukrainians in Galicia could insure its national survival and development¹³. Vranešević is one of very few Yugoslav authors who cites that love towards Moscow as a prolonged arm of the Russian imperialistic politics brought to the Ruthenians in Hungary and Galicia more harm than good and that the spirit of that politics and propaganda were reflected in the work *Исторія русского народа* by Nikola Olejarov (Олеяров), which was published in Novi Sad in 1934.

Vranešević pays a lot of attention to the historical circumstances and phenomena which followed the penetration of the capitalist relations in the Ruthenian villages in Southern Hungary in the second half of the 19th century. Then, from the still insufficiently differentiated peasant mass comes out an insignificant layer of well-off peasants who recognized the spirit of time and fought frantically to distinguish and impose themselves as rural bosses, whereas the majority of poor peasants, under the pressure of obligations and debts, not finding their place in the new social and economic circumstances, lived miserably without hope for a better life. In the description of the Ruthenian economy at the end of the 19th century and of the struggle of poor peasants with the problems and their disorientation in the new capitalist relationships, Vranešević mostly refers to the part of the chronicle of Ruski Kerestur written by Havrijil Kosteljnik¹⁴, the national chronicle of Kerestur¹⁵, the chronicle of Kocur (Москаль), and to some articles published in the Ruthenian Calendars. He picturesquely depicts the beginning of the advancement in agricultural production since the 1870s, after the implementation of land consolidation and the influence on the Ruthenians by the Germans from the neighboring settlements in agricultural production, raising of cattle, household management and the decoration of houses and settlements. The Ruthenians in Ruski Kerestur, taking Germans as a model, founded the “credit alliance” (1876). Reading rooms in Kerestur and Kocur founded at that time became a kind of reading clubs: they procured newspapers, magazines and books and organized lectures for peasants and artisans in order to stimulate the advancement of economic and social life of the village. All these changes, from the method of crop production and the development of cattle raising to the different appearance of villages and different everyday life of people were well noticed and described by Volodimir Hnatjuk when he came to stay with the Ruthenians in Bačka in 1897. He pointed out that in economic terms and way of life, the Ruthenians in Bačka surpassed significantly the Ruthenians in Southern Hungary and the Ruthenians/Ukrainians in Galicia, but that they did not have a developed cultural and national life and that they were under constant threat of Magyarization. However, he was

¹² Vranešević 1977: 236-237.

¹³ Vranešević 1977: 238.

¹⁴ Kosteljnik 1926.

¹⁵ Ramač 1988.

convinced that the local Ruthenians could be helped by the Ruthenians/Ukrainians from Galicia in putting them back on the road of their cultural and national revival and helping them resist the total assimilation¹⁶. Hnatjuk indicated that the state schools became the principal means of Magyarization of the Ruthenians and that the Uniate Church in Northeastern Hungary strongly supported the plans of the Hungarian government in the assimilation of the Ruthenians¹⁷.

Vranešević mentions a discussion about the national origin and language of the Ruthenians in Southern Hungary which started after Hnatjuk's ethnographic materials and notes on folklore of the Ruthenians in Southern Hungary had been published, when some distinguished Slavic linguists concluded that, on the basis of their language, the Ruthenians belonged to the Slovak people. Vranešević also cites the basic opinions of V. Hnatjuk and H. Kosteljnjk who refuted such opinions¹⁸.

Finally, it should be noted that there are mistakes and shortcomings, particularly in citing the origins and literature in footnotes, which might confuse or not give enough clear information to those who are less familiar with the issues.

Arpad Lebl in his relatively short article titled "Ruthenians from 1890 to 1918" deals with the economic and social life issues of the Ruthenians in Southern Hungary which had not been studied before in such a way. By careful research of the possession lists, the author comes to the conclusion that the ownership structure of the Ruthenian population at the very end of the 19th century was utterly inconvenient – more than 70% of the Ruthenian families in Kerestur and Kocur possessed from 0 to 5 cadastral acres, which was mostly not enough for the survival of many big families which were forced, in order to provide for their existence, to work in the fields as day laborers and sharecroppers. According to the author, these specific economic circumstances are the basic cause of spreading the socialist movement among the Ruthenian agrarian proletariat and pauperized peasants within chronological frames to which he directs his research¹⁹.

Lebl points out that the Ruthenians in Bačka and Srim did not have their banking institutions up until 1918 and that the Greek Catholic Church played the role of a lender. However, his claim that the Eparchy of Križevci tried to keep all financial transactions in its hands and that by doing that it hindered the formation of the Ruthenian agricultural cooperatives up to 1918, seems to be too pretentious and ideologically motivated. On the contrary, it was a Greek Catholic priest and a Ruthenian teacher in Djurdjov who initiated the formation of a Ruthenian savings bank, which in a significant measure helped the Ruthenians to buy land more easily in that settlement²⁰. There is no evidence that the Eparchy of Križevci or its representatives stood in any way against the formation and functioning of a credit alliance in Kerestur in the 1870s.

Trying to illustrate the class differentiation of the Ruthenian society and exploitation of poor people by wealthy peasants, Lebl sometimes cites, somewhat awkwardly, artificially fabricated and unconvincing arguments. Thus, due to insufficient understanding of the

¹⁶ Hnatjuk 1988: 85-86.

¹⁷ Vranešević 1977: 239-240.

¹⁸ Vranešević 1977: 239.

¹⁹ Lebl 1977: 256.

²⁰ Boyč 1933: 119.

Ruthenian language, on the basis of a folklore note, he concludes that some women used to spin for the landlords who cultivated hemp and that similarly young women used to spin for landladies in whose houses were held girls' spin nights²¹, although there are no traces about that in the sources. Of course, the wealthy peasants exploited the poor a lot. In his notes, Volodimir Hnatjuk recorded the testimonies of very poor peasants and the landless who described vividly various phenomena and practices in the process of pauperization of the Ruthenian peasantry at the very end of the 19th century²².

Lebl's claim that the Ruthenians in Kerestur grew rice at the end of the 19th century is not true, although it is true that they worked as day laborers on big rice plantations (whose owners were not Ruthenians) in the western part of the district of Kerestur on the barren area called Pekla. Here, according to the note by V. Hnatjuk from 1897, up to 800 workers worked daily on three big rice lots²³. Lebl's claim that viticulture had a significant role in the economic development of the Ruthenians is somewhat superficial and imprecise. What is true is that some Ruthenians in Srim had vineyards and orchards²⁴, but in Bačka they grew vineyards on smaller lots, mainly for their own needs²⁵.

Lebl well noted that the Ruthenians in Kerestur, after the implementation of the land consolidation in the district, started digging culverts in the flooded areas of the district. It did not go smoothly though. During the land consolidation, poor peasants got mainly poor land, often in the terrain susceptible to flooding and that is the reason why they were interested in digging the culverts. Wealthier peasants did not easily agree to have culverts dug through their land, thinking that land-reclamation measures of the flooding parts of the district would contribute to the enlargement of production and simultaneously to competence in selling the extra produce²⁶. Lebl also says that it was wealthier peasants who did not recognize the significance of railways for the faster development of the economy. Because of that the municipality of Kerestur failed to provide the money that was necessary for the passing of the railway Odžaci-Temerin near Kerestur. It soon became clear that it was a big mistake of the municipal authorities²⁷.

Using the official Hungarian statistics, Lebl tried to show the social, i.e. professional structure of the Ruthenian population in Kerestur, Kocur and Djurdjov. He points out that not all data on the number of day laborers are reliable and that there were different criteria and methodologies in their listing. However, even from the data on the size of the Ruthenian estate in Bačka at the end of the 19th century that he cites it can be concluded that the percentage of day laborers was high and that the families who owned 2-3 acres of land or less than that were forced to take to labor work in order to secure their existence. According to the official data that he refers to, among day laborers in Kerestur, Kocur and Djurdjov there was a relatively high percentage of those who were under 16 years of age (around 9% of the total number), which implies that even children, i.e. underage persons were day

²¹ Lebl 1977: 257.

²² Hnatjuk 1988; 95-106.

²³ Hnatjuk 1988: 94.

²⁴ Gubaš 1934: 168-169.

²⁵ Ramač 2007: 297.

²⁶ Žyroš 1987: 168-170.

²⁷ Lebl 1977: 257.

laborers. That is also cited by V. Hnatjuk in his notes²⁸. The first data on children day laborers in Kerestur are mentioned in a document from 1824²⁹.

Lebl writes somewhat vaguely on the attempt of the conversion of some Ruthenians to the Orthodox faith in the 1890s, not going deeper into the concrete circumstances, and cites that the main reason for that was a difficult financial situation of poor peasants. We consider that analyzing the basic motives for the conversion to another faith requires a very careful approach, bearing in mind that the basic reason for that does not have to be motivated only by religious or financial moments, but that the reason lies very often in human relationships – bad relationships between the believers and the local priest or higher church authorities, the attempt of introducing some changes, a serious division between the believers of the same parish, propaganda coming from the outside, a kind of “buying the believers” with some privileges or gifts of financial nature etc. That was the case with the attempt of conversion to the Orthodox faith by a certain number of the Greek Catholics in Stari Verbas and Kocur at the beginning of the 1890s. The very reason for this conversion is said to be the dissatisfaction with the new way in maintaining the confessional school and disagreement between the parishioners and the local priest and teacher, the propaganda by another church with the promise of various financial privileges to the apostates³⁰.

Branislav Vranešević broached the question of the participation of the Ruthenians in common political actions with the representatives of other Slavic nations in Hungary and Lebl continued the research. Although there were calls sent to Ruthenians to join the common struggle for the realization of rights of minority communities, they mainly remained unanswered. That is how it was at the Congress of nationalities in 1895 and that is how it remained until the disintegration of Austria-Hungary in 1918. Lebl concludes that there were objective reasons why the Ruthenians in Hungary should have joined other Slavic or non-Hungarian nations in their struggle against Magyarization, but that the role of a subjective factor, shortage of subjective social forces, was the main reason why this was not realized. Unfortunately, at that time the Ruthenians still did not have their social forces organized and developed which would enable them to join such a struggle³¹. One of the reasons for their staying aloof, claims Lebl, is the fact that they did not have their political party. The answer to the question why a Ruthenian community which at the beginning of the 20th century in Northeastern Hungary had around 400,000 people did not have its political party requires serious consideration. It is easier to understand why 20,000 Ruthenians who lived in a few settlements in Southern Hungary in larger numbers and in a few dozen in smaller numbers did not found either their cultural and national organization or a political party until 1918. Up until the collapse of Austria-Hungary they were practically organized only in their political and religious municipalities.

By the end of the 19th century, in settlements in which they were concentrated in bigger numbers and in which they had their parishes and confessional schools, the Ruthenians started founding church and school boards which had a significant role in the life of parishes

²⁸ Hnatjuk 1988: 102-103.

²⁹ Gavrilović 1975: 124-125.

³⁰ Ramač 1990: *passim*.

³¹ Lebl 1977: 262-269.

and in the work of confessional schools. In Lebl's opinion, the Greek Catholic clergy had the final word in the church and school boards. However, it was not always like that. For instance, at the time when the state authorities were trying to convert the Ruthenian confessional school into a state school, with the state language used in teaching process, even constant efforts of the Eparchy of Križevci and the priest of Kerestur could not prevent the church and school board, in which the representatives of the authorities and wealthy peasants had the final word, from making the decision to convert this school into a state school³². Lebl, too, cites that the Eparchy tried to save the confessional school in Kerestur and that a municipal clerk accused priest A. Laboš of inciting the people against the authorities, because he was trying to convince the members of the board not to permit converting the confessional school into a communal one³³. Only much later did people understand what they had lost and what they had gained by converting the confessional school into a state school, with the Hungarian language as the language of the teaching process. Unfortunately, the reaction of the municipality representatives directed to the competent school and state authorities in 1907 remained fruitless. Ruthenian stopped being used as a school language as it had been promised and the school authorities started appointing teachers who did not speak Ruthenian as often as possible³⁴.

Lebl believes that the church and school boards in Kerestur and Kocur decided at the end of the 19th century to enact statutes in order to protect their schools³⁵, but it is certain that it was the management of the Eparchy of Križevci who suggested, directed and controlled their enactment³⁶.

Starting from the premise that in all the tumults and conflicts within the village community he saw the struggle between classes, in the riot of the church goers in Ruski Kerestur in 1907 against the suggestion of a priest on the method of selling church chairs he, too, "recognized" the echo of a struggle between the class of poor peasants and the class of the agrarian proletariat³⁷. The facts show that the cause of the rebellion was of a completely different nature. Namely, the priest suggested that after the upgrading and expansion of the church, 24 chairs at the best place be freely given up to the village intelligentsia. The rural bosses were against it believing that these chairs should be given to those who could buy them because they saw themselves in the "most prominent" place in the church rather than poor village teachers for whose maintenance they had to allocate money. That is why the bosses incited the people to protest publicly in the church, persuading them: "You scream, and I'll pay in the tavern!"³⁸.

However, scholars, supporters of the ideology of "class struggle" in the society, concluded without any justification that the poor people of the village stood against the practice of selling the chairs in the church³⁹. In another case, Lebl quite rightly indicated

³² Kostel'nyk 1926; Polyvka 1934: *passim*; Ramač 1994.

³³ Lebl 1977: 264.

³⁴ Lebl 1977: 264.

³⁵ Lebl 1977: 264.

³⁶ Ramač 2007: 414-415.

³⁷ Lebl 1976: 62-63; 1977: 265.

³⁸ Ramač 2007: 416-418.

³⁹ Lebl 1976: 62-63; Olejarov 1934: 46.

that the management of the Eparchy of Križevci were struck by the fact that at the elections for the new church board in Kerestur (not church and school boards, as he cites it) in 1907 a certain number of socialists were elected and that it demanded that the elections be repeated⁴⁰.

In any case, A. Lebl's article, despite some errors and ambiguities, some of which we drew our attention to, represents a significant contribution in studying primarily the social and economic issues of the Ruthenians in Southern Hungary during the said period.

The most difficult, it seems, is to estimate the contribution of Nikola Gaćeša in his article "Ruthenians between the Two World Wars". On one hand, the facts he cites on the implementation of the agrarian reform on the basis of relevant archival material deserve special attention as does his description of the agricultural production of the Ruthenians in that period. However, on the other hand we should be very critical of his report on the cultural, educational and national life of the Ruthenians because in dealing with these issues he rather uncritically took over data and attitudes mainly from unreliable, propaganda and ideological work of Vladimir Biljnja, which was full of serious material errors.

At the very beginning of his paper N. Gaćeša points out that between the two World Wars the Ruthenians based their development and survival on the agricultural production, but that their part in the ownership of the cultivable soil was very small, in average somewhat smaller than 1,5 cadastre acres per person, which was barely enough for survival. No wonder that the announcement of the agrarian reform aroused great interest. In Ruski Kerestur alone there were more than 600 families interested in it – more than half the total number of families in the village. The fact that the Ruthenians made 2,3% of the landless in Vojvodina, although they made only 0,9 % of the total number of the inhabitants, is the best reflection of their poverty. In the Kula District the Ruthenians made almost the quarter of the total number of the landless⁴¹.

The author describes into small details the implementation of the agrarian reform and its rather inconvenient epilogue for its Ruthenian followers because, in the end, after the accomplished revisions, only a smaller part of the people who were listed as interested in the reform succeeded in receiving and keeping the allocated land.

The attitude of the Ministry of the agrarian reform was that the economic independence of the people interested in the reform was only possible by their further organization into agrarian communities and because of that it supported their foundation. Gaćeša researched the activities of the agrarian community in Ruski Kerestur since its foundation in 1924 when it gathered around 90 members for a very short time. Since the beginning it worked with variable success but it managed its affairs well. It often took land lease and took in rent the reed on the canal for cutting and selling. It also purchased and sold fertilizers, firewood and other staff. On the agrarian communities of the Ruthenians in Kocur (whose members were also some Serbs) and in Djurdjov there is even less information. Agrarian communities were also founded in some settlements in Srim and Slavonija where Ruthenians lived, such as in Petrovci and Mikloševci. The author concludes that the agrarian communities never had an important role in the life of the Ruthenians between the two World Wars, but they still

⁴⁰ Lebl 1977: 265.

⁴¹ Gaćeša 1977: 275-277.

represented the place around which the people interested in the agrarian reform were gathered. These communities directed partly the way and the scope of their production⁴².

In the second decade of the previous century in the weekly newspaper Руски новини – the organ of the Ruthenian National Educational Society (Руске народне просвитне друштво, henceforth the RNES), there were many articles on the cooperation of peasants in the developed European countries and its conveniences, stimulating in that way Ruthenians to organize themselves on a similar basis in their agricultural and cattle production. The assembly of the Farmers' Club in Ruski Kerestur, around which wealthy peasants were gathered, founded the "Cooperative" – a money and trade firm, whose aim was to get money from its members and give it as a loan with interest, to buy agricultural machines, sell agricultural produce and, together with the RNES, to work on the economic and educational progress of people. The "Cooperative" managed well since the beginning. By the end of the economic crisis, Ruthenian savings banks were founded in Šid and Mikloševci⁴³. In the end, we can conclude that after the research of N. Gaćeša on the economic life of the Ruthenians in the period between the two World Wars, there have not been published works that would make a more significant shift in this direction. Miron Žyroš touched on many topics: crafts, hotel and restaurant management, industry, as well as agriculture and cattle raising, but his journalistic work was intended for a broader audience and only selectively can be used as archival material⁴⁴.

Gaćeša thinks that the absence of the representatives of the Greek Catholic Ruthenian clergy and intelligentsia at the Big National Assembly in Novi Sad on 25 November 1918 can be explained by their pro-Hungarian orientation. That can be said for a part of educational workers, particularly those who worked in state schools, but not for priests like Mihajlo Mudri and Đura Bindas, who at that time did not show their pro-Hungarian orientation. We think, as well, that Jovan Hranilović, a Greek Catholic priest from Novi Sad, who presided over the Big National Assembly, had an important role in delegating the representatives of the Ruthenians at the Assembly.

In N. Gaćeša's paper the activities of the RNES, the leading cultural, educational and national organization of the Ruthenians in that period, were mainly presented without much detail and often in a negative context, which is the consequence of taking over the attitudes from unreliable sources, like the already cited work of Vladimir Biljnja, which was later turned into a book (Biljnja). His claim that the "inspirer of the foundation and the activities of the RNES was the archbishop of the Uniate Church organization from Uzhorod, who was one of the most famous leaders of Ukrainian nationalists and a bitter opponent of the October Revolution and the land of Soviets" was false and without any confirmation⁴⁵. Further, Gaćeša in his text negatively evaluates the cooperation between the RNES with archbishop Andrej Šepticki and cites that they worked on a common platform which was full of anti-Soviet and anti-socialist postulates. In the first place, archbishop A. Šepticki was the archbishop of the Galician diocese with its seat in Lviv and he had neither the power

⁴² Gaćeša 1977: 289-297.

⁴³ Gaćeša 1977: 299.

⁴⁴ Žyroš 2004.

⁴⁵ Gaćeša 1977: 301.

nor the influence on the Greek Catholic church organization in Hungary which was, in terms of the canon law, connected with the Roman Catholic Church in Hungary. Secondly, so far no one has given any evidence on the influence of archbishop A. Šepticki on the establishment of the RNES. Likewise, there is no evidence that H. Kosteljnik, originally from Ruski Kerestur, who at that time lived in Lviv and was in good relations with the archbishop, had any impact on the foundation of the RNES. All the initiative and credit for the foundation of the society belongs to Djura Bindas, a Greek Catholic priest from Djurdjov⁴⁶. We think today that qualifications such as “the leader of the Ukrainian nationalists and a bitter opponent of the October Revolution and the land of Soviets” and similar ones belong to the ideological and propaganda arsenal of the Soviet historiography and fiction and that they should be avoided, particularly in cases when without any justification they shed negative light on the whole organization which in the period between the two World Wars played a significant role in the cultural, educational and national revival of the Ruthenians in Yugoslavia.

It is not without reason that Gaćeša mentions, in a positive light, the leaflet “The Ruthenian Whip” (Руски барот) which, according to him, expressed the opposition attitude of a group of intellectuals towards the reactionary activities of the RNES⁴⁷. The leaflet “The Ruthenian Whip” was in fact a pamphlet made as a mixture of the Ruthenian, Serbian, Russian and Carpathian Ruthenian languages, with an even stranger orthography and the language that is not appropriate for a written form, full of unfounded blasphemy and allegations at the expense of the RNES, its leadership and the Greek Catholic Church in Yugoslavia. The leaflet itself represents an invitation to the Ruthenians, of whom 90% belonged to the Greek Catholic Church, to convert to Orthodoxy and to take Russian Orthodox priests and teachers from the Russian White Army emigration as priests and teachers in the Ruthenian schools⁴⁸.

The foundation of the Alliance of Ruthenian Students (1927) within the RNES, according to Gaćeša, is the outcome of their struggle against “civil” opposition⁴⁹ and, on the basis of the attitude taken over from V. Biljnja, he sheds a negative light on the overall activity of the alliance, regarding as relative what was its most significant activity – the development of cultural, educational and national life of the Ruthenians in Yugoslavia. Concerning the activities of the RNES, it is utterly inappropriate and incorrect to overlook what was at the core of its activities – the work on the cultural, educational and national revival of the Ruthenians in Yugoslavia, and to point out and highlight the part of its activities which was directed against the spreading of socialist and Bolshevik ideas and practice, qualifying it as a very negative activity. It is also quite incorrect to speak about the work of the Cultural and Educational Alliance of the Yugoslav Ruthenians (henceforth the CEAYR), which was founded as an opposition to the RNES, not on the basis of a grounded analysis of its overall activities and achievements, but on the basis of the published Platform, which looks more like a confused wish list or a screen which hides the things as

⁴⁶ Ramač 2012.

⁴⁷ Gaćeša 1977: 301.

⁴⁸ Ramač 2013.

⁴⁹ Gaćeša 1977: 301.

they are. Gaćeša, though, admits that the platform was “in many ways incomplete, partly imprecise and vague but that it still enabled the appearance and affirmation of progressive political actions in the public life of Yugoslav Ruthenians”⁵⁰. His opinion that on the pages of the publications of the CEAYR there were supplements on religious tolerance was completely ungrounded because they abounded in the texts on religious intolerance, attacks on the Greek Catholic Church and its representatives, and in propaganda on spreading the Orthodoxy among Ruthenians. Between the two World Wars the Ruthenians were mostly exclusively Greek Catholics and only in mid-thirties did some convert to the Orthodoxy (mainly men) of whom the biggest part returned to the Greek Catholic Church shortly before the Second World War.

Gaćeša positively evaluated the fact that in the publications of the CEAYR there were texts on the economic achievements and development of the USSR and reproached the leadership of the RNES for criticizing in its publications the economy and peoples’ and religious freedoms in the USSR. The question is whether such estimations on the progressiveness of the CEAYR and regression of the RNES have any sense today!

Gaćeša sees the mutual discussion between the RNES and the CEAYR, mainly led through their publications, only as ungrounded assaults of the RNES at its opposition⁵¹. We might rather say that this discussion was from both sides rather primitive and unprincipled, based on semi-truths, lies and mutual accusations, so it did not give credit to any side and it narrowed the space between their useful functioning, creating confusion in a part of the Ruthenian community and apathy towards an organized cultural, educational and national life.

The author pays little attention to the educational institutions of the Ruthenians in the period between the two World Wars, barely half a page, and that was done mainly on the basis of V. Biljnja’s texts. Thus, he does not give a full and real picture on this issue. Gaćeša did not notice the functioning and activities of the RNES in the field of education and supplying the textbooks in the Ruthenian language and education of adults starting from basic literacy up to the education of peasants, craftsmen, female population etc. He also did not recognize the activities of the RNES on inciting the secondary and higher education among Ruthenians whose objective was to create Ruthenian intelligentsia as a future promoter of a whole economic and social development of the Ruthenian community in Yugoslavia. Having this as a goal, the RNES tried to procure help to the poor in their education and to build convicts for students of higher schools.

Nikola Gaćeša gave an unrealistic picture of the political, cultural and educational life of the Ruthenians in the period between the two World Wars, because he mainly preferred the activities of the CEAYR and was restrained concerning the activities of the RNES, often showing them in a negative light as if he did not realize that the activities of the CEAYR could not be compared to what the RNES did in the field of the development and the codification of the Ruthenian language, in literature, within the cultural, artistic, theatrical and choral life, in the development of schools, from supplying textbooks in the Ruthenian language to supporting the opening of sections with the Ruthenian as a language of the

⁵⁰ Gaćeša 1977: 302-303.

⁵¹ Gaćeša 1977: 305-306.

teaching process etc.

The paper of Milenko Palić “The Ruthenians in the Labor Movement until 1941” has been so far the fullest account of the historiography of the Ruthenians in Southern Hungary/Yugoslavia. The Ruthenians in Bačka started their participation in the Labor Movement, as the author sees it, in organized strikes of agricultural and construction workers within the movement of laborers and agrarian proletariat of the Social Democratic party of Hungary by the mid 1890s. The first to describe these strikes in Kerestur was Volodimir Hnatjuk in his notes which he took according to the stories told by the very participants in the events⁵².

Another event that Palić mentions, which chronologically significantly precedes these strikes and which was also recorded in the national chronicle of Ruski Kerestur in a few lines, can hardly be defined as a form of class struggle. Namely, it concerns the expression of the peasants’ discontent who physically attacked the village duke when he leased a part of the village pasture so that money could be collected for maintaining the confessional school. This was an expression of an open opposition to the representatives of the municipal authorities and the main reason for the dissatisfaction and peasant rebellion was to be sought in difficult economic circumstances and shortage of arable land and pastures.

There are certain mistakes in the author’s reading or copying of the Ruthenian surnames (there might be some mistakes in the original documents that the author quotes) and in recognizing/not recognizing Ruthenian surnames. For instance, he considers Mihajlo Lončar and Mihajlo Klajn, who participated in a big gathering of agricultural workers in Verbas in 1896, as Ruthenians⁵³, while these are obviously not Ruthenian surnames.

In describing the beginning of the labor and socialist movement among the Ruthenians in Srim, in Berkasovo, Bačinci and Mikloševci, the author uses the already known literature⁵⁴.

On the basis of the archival material and the press of that time, Palić kept a detailed record of the activities of the Social Democratic/Socialist Party in Ruski Kerestur, pointing out that it was a well organized party and that it was one of very few local organizations in Vojvodina which was very often prosecuted by the police due to expressing its revolutionary mood and actions. Some of its members were accused of cooperation with communists⁵⁵.

There are very few details on the participation of the Ruthenians in the Labor Movement of Vojvodina until 1929. Some well-known sources mention only a few Ruthenian workers in Novi Sad who were active in the communist movement. The author believes that the broader influence of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia on the Ruthenian proletariat began with the activities of subsidiaries of agricultural workers in Ruski Kerestur, Kocur, Mikloševci, Berkasovo and Bačinci.

We might conclude that the author’s attitude towards the activities of the RNES was moderate despite his characterization of the only Ruthenian weekly (Руски новини), which was published regularly from 1924 until 1941, as a “clerically-uniat newspaper” thinking

⁵² Hnatjuk 1988: 104-106.

⁵³ Palić 1977: 310.

⁵⁴ Palić 1977: 312.

⁵⁵ Palić 1977: 316.

there was very sharp anti-communist propaganda raging in them and that they spread “misinformation on the Soviet Ukraine and Soviet Union” in the critical articles on the terror of the Bolsheviks over their opponents, on violent collectivization, on the purges of the nationally oriented Ukrainian intelligentsia, on the famine in Ukraine in 1933 and on other topics which were really present on their pages⁵⁶. We are convinced that it is hard today to deny the biggest part of this “misinformation” about which this Ruthenian weekly wrote in the 1930s. However, it is undeniable that in some moments it expressed, to say the least, “affinities” towards Nazism and Fascism as a counterweight to Communism.

Describing the activities of the CEAYR, both M. Palić and N. Gaćeša completely uncritically accept the attitudes of V. Biljnja and present this organization in a very favorable light⁵⁷, usually not checking other publications of the weekly in which there were a lot of articles that expressed rather unfavorable opinions on socialism, communism, religious tolerance etc, as the two of them thought.

The author writes about the beginning of the Communist Movement among the Ruthenians relying on the manuscript of V. Biljnja, which was made mostly on the basis of memoirs, statements and memories of the participants in those events, whose reliability is very difficult to check.

In the end, we can conclude that the collection of papers entitled “From the History of Vojvodinian Ruthenians until 1941” with five separate topics by five authors – Slavko Gavrilović, Branislav Vranešević, Arpad Lebl, Nikola Gaćeša and Milenko Palić, which encompasses the period of the history of the Ruthenians in Southern Hungary/Yugoslavia since their settlement in this region around the middle of the 18th century until 1941, written on the basis of the abundant material and well-known literature, systematically assesses all the aspects of the economic and social life of this ethnic community. At the time of its publication the collection represented the best synthetic survey of the past of the Ruthenians in this region and, despite some anachronistic views, flaws and minor material mistakes, it occupies a very significant place in the historiography of Ruthenians.

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⁵⁶ Palić 1977: 321.

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**ZBORNİK RADOVA
„IZ ISTORIJE VOJVODANSKIH RUSINA DO 1941. GODINE“**

Rezime

Zbornik radova istoričara iz Instituta za istoriju Socijalističke autonomne pokrajine Vojvodine pod naslovom „Iz istorije vojvođanskih Rusina do 1941. godine“ koji je objavljen 1977. godine predstavlja veoma značajan doprinos istoriografiji Rusina na području Južne Mađarske/Jugoslavije. Ovaj doprinos i novina u odnosu na prethodna saznanja uglavnom su rezultat stručnosti autora, njihovog proučavanja dotad nepoznatih istorijskih materijala iz nekoliko izvora i njihova procena prošlosti lokalnih Rusina u kontekstu ekonomskog i društvenog života Rusina/Ukrajnaca u severoistočnoj Mađarskoj i Galiciji i u kontekstu celokupnih ekonomskih i društvenih događaja na području južne Mađarske/Jugoslavije. Autori ovih članaka su poznati istoričari i istraživači: Slavko Gavrilović, Branislav Vranešević, Arpad Lebl, Nikola Gačeša i Milenko Palić. U ovom smo radu pokušali u najboljoj nameri da istaknemo neke mane, greške i pogrešna shvatanja u nekima od članaka da bismo skrenuli pažnju budućih naučnika na neke „nezgodne“ delove koji su često posledica korišćenja neadekvatne literature i ponekad i anahronih ideoloških stavova. Da zaključimo, ovaj zbornik radova i svaki članak u njemu predstavljaju značajan doprinos istoriografiji Rusina na ovom području i nezaobilazni su u daljem proučavanju njihove prošlosti.

Ključne reči: Rusini u južnoj Mađarskoj/Jugoslaviji, istoriografija Rusina, Slavko Gavrilović, Branislav Vranešević, Arpad Lebl, Nikola Gačeša, Milenko Palić.

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