

COVERAGE OF THE ACTIVITIES OF THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS BY THE SUBCARPATHIAN MEDIA IN THE 1920S AND 1930S

A PROVINCIAL VIEW OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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On September 10, 1919, the current Transcarpathian region of Ukraine was annexed to the First Czechoslovak Republic with the rights of autonomy by the decision of the Treaty of Saint-Germain-en-Laye. On November 29, 1920, the Council of the League of Nations adopted a resolution regarding the guarantees of the League in the implementation of the provisions on the protection of national minorities concluded between the Main Allied and United States (Great Britain, France, Italy, the USA and Japan) and the Czechoslovak Republic. In particular, the aforementioned resolution emphasized the need for Czechoslovakia to ensure proper protection of the interests of the Subcarpathian Ruthenians – the ethnic population that lived within the boundaries of Subcarpathian Rus as an autonomous territorial unit south of the Carpathians as part of a single state.

Political changes in the international arena somewhat increased the activity of Ruthenians, and first of all, its intelligentsia. Accordingly, the cultural and public life of Subcarpathia in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century developed not only under the influence of internal political factors, but also external ones. By this time, the intelligentsia of Transcarpathia was already well aware of the influence of the printed word on the people's worldview. Therefore, in the 20s of the XX century various periodicals were actively registered. In those times being under Czechoslovak Republic, it was relatively easy to found a newspaper, because the freedom of the press was guaranteed by the constitution. For comparison: if there were only 17 periodicals in Transcarpathia (including Pryashivshchyna region) during the Austro-Hungarian rule, by 1923 there were already 35 of them. Among them – 15 were in Ukrainian, 5 were Russophilic, 13 – Hungarian and 2 – Jewish. During the first fifteen years of being part of the Czechoslovak Republic, there were already 118 periodicals in Transcarpathia. The press of Subcarpathian Rus

period was clearly divided into Russian (Rusyn language), Ukrainian, Great Russian, Hungarian, Czech and Jewish. In the columns of the international review considerable attention was paid to the political development of Europe and, in particular, to the international organization League of Nations, which at that time was called to ensure peace in the world.

In the motley ethnic diversity of Subcarpathian Rus and the different political preferences of the population, it was difficult to adhere to one course of coverage of international politics. The atmosphere in which the press of the region was developing was tense and difficult. Despite the fact that Transcarpathia was annexed to the Czechoslovak Republic, Hungarian and Russian propaganda did not stop their destructive work. Accordingly, the coverage of certain events on the international arena depended on the political direction of a certain publication. In our research, we will consider two main socio-political trends: Narodovets (pro-Ukrainian) and Russophiles (pro-Russian).

With the spread of the Ukrainian nationalism ideas in Transcarpathia, populist/narodovetski (addressed to common people) newspapers and magazines began to be published actively and almost simultaneously: „Pidkarpatska Rus“, „Rusyn“, „Ruska Nyva“, „Narod“ (People), „Our native land“, „Pchilka“ (Bee), „Svoboda“ (Freedom), „New Freedom“, „People’s Power“, „Teacher’s Voice“, „Our school“, „Teacher“, „Light“, „Voice of life“, „Land and Will“, „Carpathian Truth“, „Enlightenment“, „Our Earth“, „Rusyn Sunday“, „Ukrainian Word“, „News of the Ethnographic Society“, „Progress“, „Proboyem“ (Stroke), „Carpathian Youth“, „Plastun“, „Forward“ and others.

Russophile editions such as „Russkaya Zemlya“ (Russian Land), „Russky Vĕstnyk“ (Russian Newsletter) (1919–1938), „Karpatorusskoe Slovo“ (Russian Word in Carpathia region) (1934–1938), „Karpatorusskyi Golos“ (Russian Voice in Carpathia region) (1932–1934), „Our Vanguard“ (1938), „Our Way“ (1935), „Orthodox Carpathian Rus“, „Carpathian Light“ (1928–1935) and some other periodicals made efforts to promote among the local people a sense of closeness and „blood“ kinship with Russians.

Let’s start with the analysis of the events coverage of the international context in the populist (pro-Ukrainian) direction periodicals. The following periodicals such as „Vpered“ (Forward) – the newspaper of the Social Democratic Party of Pidkarpatska Rus, the independent newspaper „Ukrainian Slovo (Word)“, „Svoboda“ (Freedom) – the paper of the People’s Christian Party, and the economic and socio-political weekly „Zemlya i Volya“ are the ones with especially distinguished pro-European position. In the newspaper „Zemlya i Volya“ we reviewed the articles in the section entitled „Shcho chuty v svitoviy politytsi?“

The newspaper „Ukrainian Slovo (Word)“, for instance, covers international events in accordance with the positions of the founding countries of the League of

Nations, while emphasizing that it is the formation of civilized states. Yet on the eve of the Soviet Union becoming a member, in an article dated March 15, 1933 it is clearly condemned the intentions of the League of Nations, saying: „The organization should care more about peace, non-aggression and brotherhood, however now it is covering up a ‚Bolshevik paradise.‘“¹ Soviet Russia is referred to here as an „enemy of civilization“ and granting it a membership in the League of Nations would mean encouraging further crimes.

In the newspaper „Vpered“ (Forward), which was the organ of the Social Democratic Party of Subcarpathian Rus, issues of international politics were vividly discussed with a distinct pro-American orientation. The article dated August 1, 1933 analyses the need to revise the peace treaties as well as discusses the important role of the League of Nations in solving the economic crisis issues. The publication also emphasized the ability of the League of Nations to prevent a possible threat to international security from Germany.²

The coverage of the role of the League of Nations in international politics by Russophile publications is quite the opposite. Here it is worth to note the negative and sometimes even mocking context of publications regarding the League of Nations.

„Narodna Gazeta“, the printed organ of the People’s Party of Czechoslovakia, apart from being Russophile, also negatively covered the international activities of the USSR. In particular, the article dated July 8, 1926 said: „Soviet Russia has concentrated all its forces to destroy the League of Nations and transfer the centre of world politics from Geneva to Moscow. The Soviet authorities plan to create an Asian bloc in opposition to Europe“³. Moreover, the „Abroad“ section highlights the dangerous position of Italy, which aimed to have economic and political dominance in the eastern Mediterranean basin as well as in all the Balkans to the northern coast of the Black Sea. Quote: „Mussolini does not believe in the moral significance of the League of Nations and refers to this organization with undisguised irony. Also, he does not believe in disarmament around Europe and is therefore looking for an ally in case of war“⁴.

On October 7, 1933, the newspaper „Karpatorussky Golos“ (The Voice of Russian Carpathia region) published an article entitled „A Matter of Conscience of the League of Nations“, which discussed the problem of hunger in Russia. Quote: „The Chairman of the Council of the League of Nations believes that the organization has neither legal nor political rights to interfere into Soviet affairs, but the is-

1 Z mizhnarodnoyi polityky. Ukrayins’ke slovo 1933, 4.

2 Chy potribna reviziia myrnykh dohovoriv? Vpered 1933, 3.

3 Kratkiy polytycheskiy obzor. Narodnaya Hazeta 1926, 2.

4 Zahranytsey. Narodnaya Hazeta 1928, 1.

sue of saving millions of people from starvation is a matter of honour for the international community and the League of Nations should not abandon it. The issue of famine in Russia was discussed at a closed meeting of the Council of the League of Nations, which concluded that the famine in the USSR was an internal matter of the Soviet government. The proposal of the Chairman of the Council to send an international commission to examine the situation was rejected. The League of Nations acted as Pontius Pilate in this case. The Soviet authorities declared that there was no famine, however the foreign correspondents were not allowed to travel beyond the borders of Moscow. Unfortunately, the League of Nations could not make pressure on Russia, because it has no troops and weapons, although it makes obvious that even political issues are solved only by force.⁴⁵ Russia hushed up the problem of mass starvation and did not allow any commission to solve it, which testifies to the political and ideological nature of the artificial hunger of the population.

In the media of 1933, a lot of notes regarding the need of the Conferences on Disarmament in Europe were a topic of the day, however, according to the authors, the results were unsuccessful. In the issue dated March 15, 1933, the attention of the international column is focused on Germany's withdrawal from the League of Nations: „German Chancellor A. Hitler announced that Germany is withdrawing from the League of Nations and leaving the Conference on Disarmament. Hitler believes that Geneva is not an effective forum for managing world politics, and the League of Nations, accordingly, is the body of French foreign policy. It is obvious that, as the article notes, the authority of the League of Nations will fall and will continue to fall. After all, the issue of peace cannot depend on an institution that cannot be decisive regarding sanctions implementation. The fact that Germany had been a member of the League for seven years did not produce any results.⁴⁶ In the November issue of 1933, the chance of Italy leaving the League of Nations is discussed, which, according to the authors, could mean the death of the organization, as only two great parties – England and France – would then remain members⁷.⁸ Since 1934, the newspaper has had a name *Nash Karpatorusskiy Holos*. In the newspaper's international review for 1934, the attention is focused on the Yugoslav-Hungarian and Italian-Abyssinian conflicts as well as on the need of the emergency session of the League of Nations for the resolution which was

5 Vopros o sovisty v Lyhe Natsiy. *Karpatorusskiy Holos* 1933, 12.

6 Konferentsia o razoruzheniy. *Karpatorusskiy Holos* 1933, 12.

7 Ytaliya vystupaet' yz Lyhy Natsiy? *Karpatorusskiy Holos* 1933, 1.

8 Yuhoslovyanskiy memorandum' peredan Lihe Natsiy, Try usloviya Hytlera, Protest' Yuhoslaviy v Lyhe Natsiy, Yuhoslovyanskiy vopros v Lyhe Natsiy, Konflykt' mezhdu Ytaliey y Abyssyniey. *Nash Karpatorusskiy Holos* 1934.

convened in December 1934 in the following articles: Yuhoslovyanskiy memorandum' peredan Lihe Natsiy, Try usloviya Hytlera, Protest' Yuhoslaviy v Lyhe Natsiy, Yuhoslavyanskiy vopros v Lyhe Natsiy, Konflykt' mezhdru Ytaliey y Abyssyniey. The newspaper was published only until 1934.⁹

In a similar way, focusing on the failure of the League of Nations to solve international problems, the Russophile newspaper „Russky Vistnyk“ covers events on the international arena. The newspaper was published almost until the end of 1938, so the hottest events of international politics were covered in this edition and, accordingly, available for our development and analysis. The March issue 1936 deals with the Italo-Abyssinian war as well as with the analysis of the issue about filling complaints of military aggression with the League of Nations from both sides. The League of Nations nevertheless recognized Italy as an aggressor and for the first time in history imposed economic sanctions against it. Quote: „A commission for the settlement of the Italo-Abyssinian war was created in Geneva, which proposes to settle the war peacefully. Reconciliation, according to the Italian Prime Minister and the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, can come when Abyssinia renounces its territories, which were conquered by Italy at that time.“¹⁰

Further events regarding the Italo-Abyssinian conflict and the League of Nations' reaction are reviewed in detail in all the newspaper issues dated during 1936. Issue 12 of „Russian Vistnyk (Herald)“, dated March 22, 1936, covers the convening of the so-called Commission of 13, having been created to reconcile the warring parties. In accordance with the publication, the commission has not fulfilled its mission, that is why it is likely to be self-liquidated. Quote: „It is also likely that the sanctions against Italy, which no one is interested in, will cease to apply. Italy's successful military operation and its confident performance in Geneva testify to the weakness of the League of Nations.“¹¹ The issue 19, dated May 10, 1936, deals with the League of Nations' resolution of the Locarno conflict: „The matter will be dealt with by the Council of the League of Nations. Germany has been invited to the meeting“; however, Geneva „circles“ are waiting for a preliminary response from Berlin. In any case, it will be interesting to watch the events, as once again it proves the disability of the Council of the League of Nations, with its current composition, to solve European problems. The consequence will be the further arming of states.“¹² The issue, dated May 17, 1936, covers the meeting of the

9 Yuhoslovyanskiy memorandum' peredan Lihe Natsiy, Try usloviya Hytlera, Protest' Yuhoslaviy v Lyhe Natsiy, Yuhoslavyanskiy vopros v Lyhe Natsiy, Konflykt' mezhdru Ytaliey y Abyssyniey. Nash Karpatorusskiy Holos 1934.

10 Chto tvorytsya vokruh' nas'? Russkiy Vistnyk' 1936, 3.

11 Idem, 5.

12 Idem, 4.

Council of the League of Nations regarding the Italo-Abyssinian war once again, it says: „In response to the invitation of a delegate from Abyssinia by the League of Nations, the Italian delegation, on Mussolini's command, left Geneva and declared that it would not contribute to the solution of European questions until sanctions are not cancelled. This was the final strike to the quite deteriorating League of Nations. Further negotiations regarding the annexation of Abyssinia will be held in the newly formed League of Nations, as the background for the reorganization has already been prepared. The main harbingers of the organization reforming are problems in Western Europe, especially the ones in the states interested in the Mediterranean Sea.“¹³ The June 28 issue covers the decisions of the Council of the League of Nations meeting, where the sanctions against Italy were lifted. Speaking of the meeting, dated June 26, 1936, Minister Croft represented Czechoslovakia and Subcarpathian Rus and he also voted for the lifting of the sanctions. Germany has announced to rejoin the League of Nations but only if it is reformed. A rather satirical quote by German Minister Goebbels was also published: „The League of Nations is a good thing, but a good army is better.“¹⁴

Let's summarize our review of Subcarpathian periodicals with the analysis of the newspaper *Nedilya*, which was a part of a separate Ruthenian direction, however, it was still under the influence of Russophile sentiments. This periodical was often criticized by pro-Ukrainian conscious forces for creating an artificial language and spreading the idea of Ruthenians as separate people. Moving accordingly in chronological order, we will cover in our analysis the issues of 1936,¹⁵ 1937–1938 time scope. In the issue, dated May 16, 1937, a long article was published in the column of the *International Review* entitled „League of Nations and England”, where it was noted that the League of Nations had almost completely lost its importance and authority. Quote: „English politicians are trying to figure out the reasons for the organization's failures and are considering the ways to restore its authority. In England, they believe that after reforming the League of Nations charter, it will still be able to ensure peace in the world. The British also note that the reason for the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations was that not all countries became its members. But what should member states do when one country attacks another despite the prohibitions? The Italo-Abyssinian war was such a test. Does it mean that all the states that had signed the „Declaration of Peace“ must apply military sanctions in the event of aggression, and hence start another war? Would England be able to master the war, being the only country to face and to cope with the conflict while the other 52 members would contribute

13 Chto tvorytsya vokruh' nas'? *Russkiy Vistnyk* 1936, 4.

14 *Idem*, 5.

15 *Koly bude voyna? Nedilya* 1936, 1.

only formally?¹⁶ In the following editions, it was mentioned about the number of sessions and meetings (five or even more) held by the Council of the League of Nations. Quote: „However, they never managed to find a universal tool for maintaining peace and preventing international conflicts.“¹⁷ In the issue dated for 1938, the tense foreign political situation in the world is analysed while the activities of the League of Nations are hardly mentioned. All the attention in the March issue is focused on the German occupation of Austria and on international relations between individual countries.¹⁸ At the same time, a more comprehensive and objective study of the raised problem in the future requires the mandatory involvement of a wider source base, in particular - periodicals and presses of Transcarpathia of the specified period. Our scientific intelligence is highly specialized and, of course, needs further development and expansion of the analysis of periodicals.

16 Anhliya i Liha Natsiy. Nedilya 1937, 2.

17 Zahranychnyy perehlyad. Nedilya 1937, 1.

18 Zahranychnyy perehlyad. Nedilya 1938, 1.

Mediální pokrytí činnosti Společnosti národů na Podkarpatské Rusi ve 20. a 30. letech 20. století

Provinční pohled na mezinárodní politiku

Článek analyzuje příspěvky a údaje věnované činnosti Společnosti národů, publikované na stránkách periodik Podkarpatské Rusi v letech 1919–1938. V práci je zdůrazněn vliv národní příslušnosti a politického směřování publikací. Tomuto problému se v ukrajinské historiografii téměř nikdo nevěnuje i přes jeho evidentní aktuálnost. Studie umožňuje porozumět hlavním etapám vývoje zakarpatského tisku v meziválečném období a jeho roli jako zdroje pro studium historie a etnografie regionu. Článek se pokouší určit roli lokálních periodik v procesu utváření národního sebeuvědomění Zakarpatských Ukrajinců, zároveň zjišťuje dopad v rámci etnických, politických a kulturních procesů na Podkarpatské Rusi a pokouší se pochopit vliv politického prostředí na vznik regionálních periodik. Výzkumu zkoumá dva hlavní sociálně-politické trendy: proukrajinský a rusofilský (proruský). V předkládané studii byla vůbec poprvé zpracována původní meziválečná periodika, která dala možnost nahlédnout do realit společenského a politického života regionu.