

## SECTION II

### BORDERLANDS AS NICHES FOR RELICT SMALL NATIONS

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**REGION**  
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#### LEMKOS AS A SMALL RELICT NATION

Lemkos are a group of the Ruthenian population that reaches furthest to the west and stands apart from the Polish and Slovak peoples as far as culture, religion and language are concerned. From the 14<sup>th</sup> century until 1944, they densely inhabited a territory that spread in the form of an elongated wedge on both, Polish and Slovak sides of the Carpathians from the Solinka and the Laborec Rivers in the east, up to the Poprad River in the west (Fig. 1). Ethnically, it was a homogeneous Lemko region. The Polish and the Slovak population occupied only a few towns. The territory on the Polish side of the Carpathians inhabited by the Lemkos is called the Lemko Region (Łemkowszczyzna). It covers the eastern part of the Beskid Sądecki, the Lower Beskid and the western edge of the Bieszczady Mountains.

The Lemkos are not native to the Beskid Mountains. Their ancestors appeared in the region in relatively late time: from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century a pastoral nomadic population of Vallachio-Ruthenian origin was pushing along the Carpathians from present-day Romania to the north and west. Gradually they settled in the uninhabited or thinly populated valleys of the southern mountain region of Poland up to Moravia. The ethnic composition of this colonisation was dominated by Balkan element. From the 15<sup>th</sup> century, however, the Ruthenian element began to prevail. Nevertheless, it was not until the 16<sup>th</sup> century that the Vallachian population in the Bieszczady Mountains and the Lower Beskid was completely Ruthenized (Czajkowski, 1992; Parczewski, 1992; Reinfuss, 1948, 1987, 1990; Sapoliga, 1992).

The contemporary Lemko population was formed in a long historical process of assimilation of different ethnic elements including Polish, Vallachian and first of all Ruthenian. Actually, in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries the Ruthenian settlers outnumbered the other ethnic groups which led to their linguistic and cultural Ruthenization (Reinfuss, 1990).

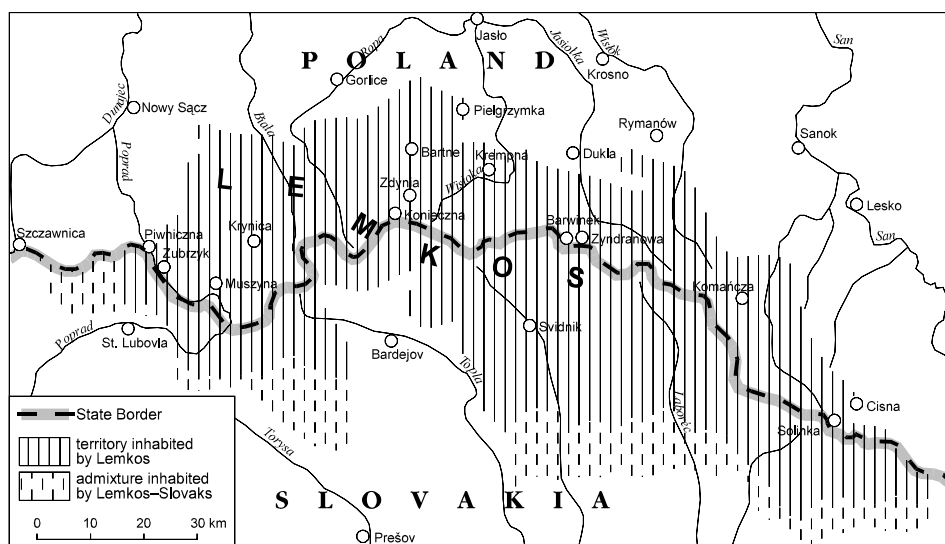


Fig. 1. Distribution of Lemkos in 1944 according to Reinfuss (1990)

Until the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the overwhelming majority of villages in the Lower Beskid were founded. The ethno-cultural and religious border line dividing Polish and Ruthenian populations that was formed at that time has survived till 1944 (Czajkowski, 1992; Smoleński, 1935).

The name 'Lemko' appeared in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is a local folk nickname that had been adopted by scientific literature. It had been popularised by Polish and Slovak ethnographers but it had not been known among the Ruthenian population for a very long time. It was only during the inter-war period that it was generally accepted by the Ruthenians of the northern side of the Carpathians as their proper name (Czajkowski, 1992; Reinfuss, 1948, 1990). On the Slovak side, however, the name 'Lemko' is almost completely unknown among the Ruthenian population. They call themselves Rusins, Rusnak. Nevertheless, ethnically and as far as their culture, language and religion are concerned, the Ruthenian population that live on both sides of the Carpathians form one group (Sapoliga, 1992).

Different culture, language and religion have distinguished Lemkos from the Poles. These differences, contributed to development of ethno-national identity among the Lemkos. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there arose in East Galicia an Old Ruthenian orientation – also called the Russophil orientation – propagated by the Orthodox Church. This was based on the idea of integration of all Ruthenians under the tsar's domination. This orientation appeared in the Lemko Region as well. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a new political orientation sprang up among Ruthenian intellectuals in Lvov. It emphasized the separateness of the Ruthenians from the Russians. It proclaimed building an

independent Ukrainian country. However, most people in the Lemko Region were against this idea. The Ukrainian propaganda led mainly by the Greek Catholic Church caused many conflicts between the Lemkos and the Greek Catholic clergy. It was the main reason why most Lemkos converted into Orthodox Church, especially during the period between the two World Wars.

A relentless political struggle broke out between both parties. Lemkos bore the dramatic consequences of the collisions between various national orientations during the First and the Second World Wars when the pro-Russian and pro-Ukrainian activists took advantage of the political and military situation to persecute and to eliminate their opponents.

The new political order in Europe after the Second World War entailed demographic changes. Poland belonged to a group of states which completely changed their ethnic structures at that time. Both changes to the country's borders and extensive migrations of its populations exerted great influence on this process.

In the years 1944–1946 Lemkos were displaced as a result of an agreement made between the interim Polish communist government and the governments of the Ukrainian SSR and Belorussian SSR. The agreement provided for a displacement of “citizens of Ukrainian, Belorussian, Russian and Ruthenian nationalities” from the territory of Poland to the Ukrainian and Belorussian SSR. In official documents from that time the displacement was referred to as ‘evacuation’, which was a completely inappropriate term. The documents emphasised the voluntary character of the action and the fact that no pressure would be used. The Polish communist government, having signed the displacement agreement, carried out the policy which aimed at transforming Poland into an ethnically and culturally homogenous state, without any ethnic minorities. Although depopulation was planned as voluntary, nevertheless the rule of people's freedom to choose their destination was not observed during the whole length of the action. Pressure of both administrative and economic nature was used, and after the army got involved at the second stage, the element of ‘voluntarity’ was no longer present. Eventually, some 483,000 ‘Ukrainians and Ruthenians’ left Poland. Lemkos were among them. It has been estimated that at least 70,000 people, about 60–70% of the Lemkos population were moved (Duć-Fajfer, 1992; Kwilecki, 1970; Michna, 1995; Misiło, 1992; Nyczanka, 1987; Pudło, 1992).

Another wave of the depopulation took place in 1947. It was directly connected with the ‘Wisła’ action carried out in the eastern and south-eastern parts of Poland. It was aimed against the troops of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UIA) and political centres of the Ukrainian Nationalist Organisation (UNO) and as a result at the elimination of the UIA and a complete replacement of the origins of the Ukrainians from the voivodships of: Cracow, Rzeszów, Lublin to the voivodships of Western and Northern Poland. The ‘Wisła’ action was

conducted on the entire territory of the Lemko Region, even though UIA's activities were of rare occurrence at that time – in particular in its western part (Misiło, 1992; Nyczanka, 1987; Pudło, 1992).

This time, however, the displacement was forced, people had no right to choose the place of migration. Religion was the main criterion used to classify people for displacement – the populations of Greek Catholic and Orthodox Church were moved. Everyone who was considered Ukrainian by the Polish authorities had to go.

The total number of displaced Lemkos during the 1947 the 'Wisła' action has been estimated at 30,000–35,000, which is about 25% of the Lemkos who used to live there before the war. Taken together with depopulation which took place in the years of 1944–1947, 98–99% of this populations deported (Kwilecki, 1964, 1970, 1974; Nyczanka, 1987; Pudło, 1992; Reinfuss, 1990).

The 'Wisła' action had two objectives: a military and a political one. The army was to eliminate the nationalist, well-armed Ukrainian underground organisation. The solution of the Ukrainian question in Poland, through displacement and a purposeful dispersion of the Ukrainians and Lemkos in the North and West of Poland in order to impose complete assimilation on them, was the political objective.

The displacement of the Lemko population destroyed irreversibly the specific ethnic and cultural character of the Lemko Region. The ethnic composition that had existed there without changes since the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, were completely transformed.

In the Lemko Region no swift replacement of one ethnic group with another one took place. The country was practically deserted. Some 320 villages spread throughout the region covering the area of 4,000 km<sup>2</sup> (Lower Beskid and Bieszczady Mountains) had hardly any inhabitants. Many of them disappeared completely. The number of inhabitants along the Czechoslovak border fell down to 4 persons per one square kilometre (before the Second World War the number of inhabitants in the Lemko Region per square kilometre averaged 50 persons). During a few post-war years the region, which used to be over-populated, became almost deserted and despite the attempts to repopulate it. Till now the Lemko Region has not reached the number of population and economy standing from the pre-war times.

After the political changes in 1956, a small number of Lemkos came back to their ethnic homeland in the Beskids. They encountered however some administrative impediments. Besides, Lemkos in many cases had nothing to return to, or they had to repurchase their own houses from their Polish settlers.

Now, on the Polish side of the Carpathians, in the Lemko Region, the Lemko population lives, very widely dispersed, on the territory of six districts in over 60 villages. Decidedly, the largest concentration of the Lemko people occurs in the

Uście Gorlickie district and in the towns of Krynica and Komańcza. Despite the returns after 1956, the number of Lemko people who live now on the Polish side of the Carpathians is estimated at not more than 5% of the total number of Lemkos on this territory before 1944, that is, about only 4–6 thousand people. However, these are only approximate data that can differ significantly, depending on what kind of criteria are applied. Anyway, the Lemkos are certainly a minority in the northwestern part of the Carpathians – for both ethnic and religious reasons. As a matter of fact Polish populations of Roman Catholic faith people prevail in this area. The Lemko Region in their pre-war form has ceased to exist (Barwiński, 1998, 1999, 2001).

Though the collapse of the communist system and the democratisation of life in Poland after June 1989 did not eliminate the irrevocable consequences of the post-war history nevertheless Lemkos got new opportunities to function in the Polish State.

The most thorny problem for Lemkos is the usufruct of their temples taken over by the Roman Catholic Church after the Greek Catholic Church was illegalized in 1946. In spite of the official repudiation of the Uniate Church in some parishes the Greek Catholic services could be performed. Nowadays these communes are the largest concentrations of the Greek Catholics in the Lemko Region. However, most of the Lemkos were faced with the dilemma of whether to attend Roman Catholic services or keep the Eastern rites with no chances of belonging to Greek Catholic Church that is to say to turn Orthodox. The overwhelming majority declared for the Orthodox Church. The liturgy turned out to be more important than the administrative affiliation (Pactwa, 1992; Wojewoda, 1994).

The fear of Latinization was an important factor as well. The choice of the Greek Catholic Church was often considered as a declaration of nationality what was likely to be followed by the rapid Ukrainization – especially after the Vatican II when the official name Ukrainian Catholic Church had been introduced. Moreover, for Lemkos coming back to their homeland conversion to the Orthodox Church was very often the only possibility to pray in their own temples since many of them were taken over by the Orthodox Church. These difficult decisions led to very sharp conflicts which disunited villages and even families.

It was only in 1980s that the situation of Greek Catholics in the Lemko Region started to get better. Roman Catholic Church which formally remained the owner of the Lemkos' temples became more open to the Greek Catholic services. Before the Lemkos displacement the Uniat Church owned over one hundred temples in the Lemko Region. In several ancient Lemko temples, even in villages inhabited by both Polish and Lemkos, only Roman Catholic messes are said. In 1947 Polish Autocephalos Orthodox Church also took possession of several Greek Catholic churches which still remain under its control.

The usufruct of the Uniate churches by the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church is the main reason why conflicts arise in the Lemko Region. This question not only separates Poles and Lemkos but also disunites Lemkos themselves. The inquiry<sup>1</sup> shows that more conflicts exist within the Lemko community than between Lemkos and Poles<sup>2</sup>. Most of the responders – over 70% – pointed to religion as a primary cause of these conflicts (Barwiński, 1998, 1999, 2001).

Among Lemkos inhabiting the Beskid Mountains Greek Catholicism is still a predominant religion – as it was before the Second World War. However, there is a substantial difference in the number of believers. In 1939 Greek Catholics constituted 87.8% of Lemkos, whereas now they barely constitute 50%. The Orthodox composed only 12.2% of the population before the displacement. Nowadays over 45% of Lemkos in the Carpathian region are Orthodox.

The inactivity of the Uniate Church was a basic motive for conversions to the Orthodox Church. Had it not been for political and administrative decisions of the Polish communist government, the religions structure of the contemporary Lemko Region would be different. A great number of Lemkos joined the Roman Catholic Church as it was the only accessible religion for dozens of years.

The basic goal of the Lemkos' forced displacement in the 'Wisła' operation in 1947 was their complete assimilation. However, it was not the case. In spite of the propitious factors such as dispersion, mixed marriages, Polish schools, pressure of the political authorities, impediments of contacts with the indigenous culture, neither social nor cultural assimilation has been accomplished.

Besides religion, the Lemkos language was another crucial factor that was instrumental in preserving their identity and distinctiveness. According to the inquiry almost all responders used their own language to communicate with other Lemkos. It was either Ukrainian or Lemkos language – according to the national orientation. Some responders claimed that they used both languages<sup>3</sup>. The research proved that Lemkos had not lost their mother tongue despite being influenced by the Polish society for over fifty years. Not only do they use it widely, but also teach their children how to speak it<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> The inquiry has been carried out in June–July 1994 in 30 villages scattered on the entire area of the Lemko Region. The examination concerned exclusively the population of Lemkos origin. The author employed a method of the standardised inquiry (Barwiński, 1998, 1999, 2001).

<sup>2</sup> The question: *Do you conflicts exist among Lemkos* has been answered in the affirmative by 59.2% of responders. A similar question concerning conflicts *between Lemkos and non-Lemkos* has been answered affirmatively by 43.7% of responders and negatively by 46.5% of responders, with 9.8% of abstainers.

<sup>3</sup> The question *What language do you speak at home* has been answered as follows: Lemko – 83.1%, Ukrainian – 8.5%, Lemko and Ukrainian – 4.2%, Polish – 2.8%, Lemko and Polish – 1.4%.

<sup>4</sup> The question *What language is commonly spoken by your children* has been answered as follows: Lemko – 80%, Ukrainian – 9.1%, Lemko and Ukrainian – 7.3%, Polish – 3.6%.

The specific character of the Lemko community is manifested both by their distinct culture, traditions, costumes and symbols, as well as by values and behavioural patterns. These elements, handed down from generation to generation constitute a base of their cultural identity. As much as 93% of responders admitted the existence of some distinctiveness in the Lemkos culture. As its primary manifestation they mentioned their language, costumes, customs whereafter religion, folk-songs, architecture and ceremonials.

The research reveals a division of the Lemkos national consciousness into two opposite orientations. The partisans of the Lemko orientation definitely deny any connection with the Ukrainian nation. They call themselves “we – the Lemkos” and emphasise their national distinctiveness. On the other hand, the adherents of the Ukrainian orientation insist on a unity of Lemkos and Ukrainians. They regard all Lemkos as an “ethnic group of the Ukrainian nation”. Obviously this national disunity of Lemkos is not a recent phenomenon. It has existed since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it produced tragical results for Lemkos themselves during the First and the Second World War.

In the course of investigation, the inhabitants commonly regarded as Lemkos were asked the question: *With which of the following groups do you identify yourself: Lemkos, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, Poles, local inhabitants?* The majority of responders pronounced themselves to be Lemkos (74.7%), thereafter Ukrainians (12.7), Ruthenians (5.6%), Lemko-Ukrainians (5.6%), local inhabitants (1.4%).

Spatial correlation between the national declaration and their habitat turned out to be very significant. In the area between Krynica and Wisłok Wielki none of the responders considered themselves to be Ukrainian or Lemko-Ukrainian. Those who identified themselves with the Ukrainian nation inhabit exclusively the eastern Lemko Region (villages of Szczawne, Rzepedź, Komańcza, Radoszyce, Smolnik). However, the answer ‘Lemko’ also occurred in this region whereas the declaration of the Ruthenian nationality appeared only in the western Lemko Region.

However, the statement that in eastern and central Lemko Region there are no Lemkos with their Ukrainian national consciousness would be illegitimate. One could have drawn such a conclusion only after having inquired all Lemkos families in the Beskid Mountains, which is technically impossible. Moreover, some responders would undoubtedly not avow publicly the Ukrainian national consciousness because of the negative stereotype of Ukrainians that have existed in Polish society since the Second World War and the early post-war period. Therefore this research gives only a rough representation of the processes and it is based on the presupposed sincerity of its responders.

Despite these reservations the results of the investigation confirm the repudiation of the Ukrainian national consciousness by the majority of Lemkos. Generally, Lemkos stress their national distinctiveness in relation to both Poles and Ukrainian.

Moreover, the inquiry belies the cliché which links indissolubly Greek Catholic religion with the Ukrainian national identity as over 45% of those who declared themselves as 'Lemko' were Greek Catholic.

The investigation has shown a strong sense of cultural, linguistic and national identity among Lemkos inhabiting the nowadays Lemko Region. Today, like it was on the turn of the 19th century and between the two World Wars, the majority of Lemkos endeavour to preserve their specific consciousness and the distinct character of their community in relation to both Ukrainians and Poles. Nevertheless, one must keep in mind the existence of a group of Lemkos who identify themselves with the Ukrainian nation. There is no reason to call in question the Ukrainian nationality of these people likewise there is no reason to contest the Lemko nationality of those who label themselves as members of the Lemko nation. The question of nationality should be subject to free choice of people.

The political changes in Poland in the last few years contributed to the cultural, social and political activization of Lemkos. In all likelihood this process will continue and it will support the preservation of Lemkos specific culture and national identity. However, it depends mainly on Lemkos themselves.

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