

The Ukrainian Diaspora in Romania and Social Actions: a View from Ukraine

THE UKRAINIAN DIASPORA IN ROMANIA AND SOCIAL ACTIONS: A VIEW FROM UKRAINE

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Abstract

Despite the lack of deep interconnections between the Ukrainian Diaspora in Romania and the population in Ukraine, there are some positive signs of mutual interest. The Ukrainians in Romania are very anxious about the evolution of the conflict in Eastern Ukraine and would like to see it settled as soon as possible. At the same time, it is important to ensure the impartiality of the media space regarding the events in Eastern Ukraine, for a proper assessment of the situation in the country. The conclusion of the Intergovernmental Agreement on local border traffic is very important for establishing interpersonal contacts between representatives of the Ukrainian Diaspora in Romania and the Ukrainian population. In addition, the creation of a consular post in Solotvino would enable more than two million citizens – both Romanian and Ukrainian – to cross the common border in a simplified form.

Keywords: Ukrainian Diaspora, local border traffic, interpersonal contacts, conflict, Eastern Ukraine

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Introduction

The Ukrainians are the fourth largest ethnic community in Romania, after Romanians, Hungarians and Roma. According to the 2011 census, the Ukrainian ethnic community in Romania counts 51,007 people, less than 1 percent (0.27 percent) of the total population of Romania. Representatives of the Ukrainian Diaspora are living mainly in the northern part of Romania, on the border with Ukraine in Maramures and Bucovina, and in the Danube region (Northern Dobrogea and Romanian Moldavia). More than half of all Ukrainians of Romania are living in the county of Maramures (34 027 people), where they make up 6.67% of the population. A large number of Ukrainians also lives in Suceava (8 506) and Timis (7 261 persons). Ukrainians make up the main part of population in the villages of Bistri, Remeti, Ulma, Izvor, Copacele and some others².

On December 29, 1989, the Union of Ukrainians of Romania (UUR) was created. As the official representative of the Ukrainian minority in Romania, the UUR can obtain a seat in the lower House of the Romanian Parliament, the Chamber of Deputies, provided that its candidate receives at the national level a number of votes that is higher than 1/10 of the electoral coefficient (the total number of valid votes divided by the number of electoral districts) – a level that the UUR has constantly met. The UUR and another organization, the Democratic Union of Ukrainians in Romania (DUUR), formed in 1996, have conducted intensive organizational work among the Ukrainians in Romania, and this was especially true for the initial period of these organizations.

Diplomacy and cultural exchange

In 1990, in the village of Ruskovo (Maramures county) the first International Festival of Ukrainian song was organized under the auspices of the

² “Ukrayintsi Rumuniyi”, <http://litopys.com.ua/diaspora/rumuniya/ukrayintsi-v-rumuniyi/>, last accessed on November 30, 2014.

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URA, an event which was attended by self-active groups from different regions of Romania and representatives of some foreign countries, including Ukraine. In 1991, a similar festival was held in the Copacele village (Caras-Severin County), in western Romania. The next year, in June 1992, the festival took place in the city of Tulcea. In September 1993, this important event aiming to promote the cultural revival and the enrichment of Ukrainian traditions in Romania was hosted by the village of Nehostyna (Suceava County), with the participation of a popular Ukrainian artist, Nazar Yaremchuk.³

Some Ukrainian researchers, such as Rendyuk, argue that the International Festival of Ukrainian song in Romania gradually lost its attractiveness, rather than become a large-scale traditional cultural event for the whole Ukrainian community in Romania (particularly for the younger generation) and some years later it was cancelled completely. The Romanian government preferred to finance the annual festival of Ukrainian Christmas carols and Ukrainian winter customs, traditionally held in January, in the city of Sighetu-Marmatiei.

The causes of this process are linked to the shift in the attitude of the UUR –that is, a gradual withdrawal from full-fledged activities aimed at maintaining, reviving and comprehensively developing the cultural life of the Ukrainian minority, towards a more formal style of work. That is why the repeated proposals made by Ukrainian intellectuals in Romania to transform such festivals, financed by the Department for Interethnic Relations in the Romanian government, into “meetings of experts” with “round tables” to discuss the real condition of Ukrainian culture in Romania and the perspectives of its development, did not find support among the leaders of the Ukrainian movement in Romania. Therefore, the amateur folk art groups and clubs in Bucharest and in the Caras-Severin,

³ T.G. Rendyuk, “Ukrainians of Romania: National-Cultural Life and Interrelations with Government”, <http://www.history.org.ua/LiberUA/978-966-02-5826-6/978-966-02-5826-6.pdf>, last accessed on November 30, 2014.

Maramures, Suceava, Timis, Tulcea counties remained without any coordination of their activities.

Also, for quite a long time, the UUR had no real strategy and no real program for the spiritual revival of the Ukrainians in Romania, for preserving their national identity and so on. The main reason for this was the lack of unity among the Ukrainians in Romania, the weak internal cohesion in the UUR itself, the de-politicization of the younger generation, which could otherwise intensify the social and political life of the Ukrainian minority. The periodical quarrels and divergences between the UUR and its opponents from the DUUR also impeded the process of finding the most convenient and appropriate scenario for the cultural management of the Ukrainian community in Romania.⁴

It is worth adding that the bilateral relations between Ukraine and Romania have seen some improvements after the “Maidan events” in the beginning of 2014. The Romanian side expressed full understanding for all that had taken place in Kiev and in other Ukrainian cities, and Bucharest was among the first capitals who supported the new Ukrainian leadership. From the very beginning of “Maidan” and the first explosions in Eastern Ukraine, Romania expressed its deep concern and applied all efforts to restrain the course of events from further deterioration. Of course, all this was done in diplomatic way, although there were cases of Romanian humanitarian aid to Ukraine that had, predominantly, a private character.

It should also be noted that Romania has always supported the plans of political association and economic integration of Ukraine with the European Union and became the first European country to ratify the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU, on July 3, 2014. During the bilateral consultations in Bucharest between the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, Bogdan Aurescu, and his Ukrainian counterpart, Pavlo Klimkyn, the Romanian side expressed its

⁴ *Ibidem.*

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support for Ukraine's efforts in the implementation of the Association Agreement, and declared its readiness to provide experts in specific areas of interest for the Ukrainian authorities, particularly in relation with the implementation of comprehensive institutional and economic reforms, the adaptation of legislation to European standards, and providing development assistance. Some assistance may be got by means of an active support of these activities by representatives of Ukrainian Diaspora of Romania. The most important issue is the support for Ukraine's policy aimed at resolving the conflict in eastern Ukraine by peaceful means.

It should be noted that the foreign ministers of Romania and Ukraine have agreed on the resumption of work of the Intergovernmental group of expert on the issues of national minorities and agreed to the first meeting of the co-chairs. They also discussed the opening of the Romanian Cultural Institute in Kiev with a branch in Chernivtsy. In the near perspective, it may promote the interaction and intercultural dialogue between the Ukrainian and Romanian sides and between the ethnic Diasporas of two countries.⁵

Equally important for establishing interpersonal contacts between representatives of Ukrainian Diaspora in Romania and the population of Ukraine is the realization and implementation of the Intergovernmental Agreement on local border traffic. The draft Agreement is under consideration in the Romanian and Ukrainian governments.⁶ It is very easy to watch some mountains and villages of Maramures county from the territory of Ukraine – one should take the road Yassin – Mukachevo up to Bushtin and look to the left, at the bank of the Tisa. One of the main cities of Maramures county – Sighetu Marmatiei – is very well seen from

⁵ Remarks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on its responsibilities in relation to the Romanian Cultural Institute, <http://mae.ro/en/node/20347>, last accessed on November 30, 2014.

⁶ “Klimkin napravil v Kabinet proekt soglashenie o pogranychnom dvizhenii s Rumynie” <http://lenta.com.ua/1620279.html>, last accessed on November 30, 2014.

Solotvino. But, despite this proximity, there is little contact between citizens of Transcarpathia and Maramures. The reason for this is simple: Maramures has only two railroad crossings, which are insufficient even for a limited number of local residents. Thus, the creation of a consular post in Solotvino should facilitate contacts between more than two million Romanians and Ukrainians, who would get an opportunity to cross the common border in a simplified form.

Meanwhile, border crossing is not available to all Ukrainians, but only to those who have an additional tab to the internal passport. These tabs can be purchased only by residents of the border areas of Zakarpattia – Rakhiv, Tyachiv, Khust and Vinogradiv. For non-local residents – for example, citizens of Lviv and Uzhgorod – none of the local border crossings is available and it is worth taking the road through Hungary and using the Vylok – Tiszabecs border crossing. Fortunately, the Hungarian and Romanian border guards do not require from citizens of Ukraine other documents except for the passport. So, facilitating the installation of a no-visa regime is of high importance for citizens of both Romania and Ukraine.⁷

As for the cultural contacts, it should be noted that some years ago Ukrainian Guzuls from Zelena (Ukraine) and Repedia (Romania) won a grant under the “Guzul cultural center” that financed through the ENPI Cross-border Cooperation Programme Hungary – Slovakia – Romania – Ukraine 2007-2013. Many cultural programs are planned for 2015, including performances in Ukraine by folk ensembles of Ukrainian Diaspora. It would be very good and reasonable if Ukrainian artists and ensembles also got an opportunity to visit Romania, but this is practically impossible without financial support.

For a proper assessment of the situation in Ukraine by the Ukrainian Diaspora in Romania, it is highly important to ensure the impartiality of the media

⁷ Oleksa Livinskij, “Ukrayinska diaspora v Rumunii znikaye”, <http://cygan.ucoz.ru/publ/7-1-0-36>, last accessed on November 30, 2014.

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space, in particular concerning events in Eastern Ukraine. We can have similar stances towards some notorious press publications aimed at forcing panic and misrepresentation of the military mobilization of ethnic Romanians in Ukraine, as well as those that question the presence of Ukrainian ethnicity. Recently, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania, Bogdan Aurescu, denied any rumors of priority mobilizing of ethnic Romanians in Ukraine for fighting in the eastern regions of the country. These publications have received negative assessments and have been refuted by both the Ukrainian side and by expert circles of Romania.⁸

Conclusions

In conclusion, it should be noted that the Ukrainian population in Romania has a considerable historical background. In order to avoid the process of their cultural assimilation, in the long run, it is necessary to encourage the organization of ethnic festivals and other cultural events on the territories of Romania, Ukraine and of other countries, to preserve their traditions and cultural values, to be attentive to their possible problems in different aspects of life. One could hope that both Romanian and Ukrainian governments are really concerned about it.

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⁸ Bogdan Matei, Cristina Ştirbeţ, "Rumuni ta vijna na shodi Ukrayini", http://www.rri.ro/uk_uk/Румуни_та_війна_на_сході_України-2526694, last accessed on November 30, 2014.

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