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Political Neo-Rusynism as an Element of the Russian Hybrid War Against Ukraine and the Countries of Eastern Europe

Abstract. The beginning of the 21st century supplemented the list of modern challenges and threats with a new concept of “hybrid war”. As stated by the author of the article, hybrid war uses all types of state power and tools available to it, including disinformation, to impose its will on another state, attacking the weakest points of society’s development, and, accordingly, to achieve its results. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, and especially with the beginning of Russian aggression against the Ukrainian state, the issue of “political rusynism” as an element of hybrid war has today become an effective tool for Russia to blackmail many countries of Central and Eastern Europe. According to the author of the article, this applies not only to Ukraine, but also to Slovakia, Poland, Romania as well as Moldova, where a large Ukrainian-Rusyn community lives. The issue of countering modern challenges and threats, including political rusynism, requires a more careful study of this problem. The purpose of the presented article is to briefly highlight the main reasons for the revival of political rusynism on the territory of Ukraine, to clarify modern neo-rusynism movements and their leaders of thought, as well as to outline the main measures to institutionalize the basic ideas of neo-rusynism in Ukraine as elements of a massive Russian hybrid war. The author shows the historical connection between Russia’s use of rusynism and the current situation in the region. The author’s opinion is that deep understanding of the nature of political rusynism will allow various interested institutions of Ukraine, in particular state bodies, to effectively neutralize and prevent, including within the framework of multi-format international platforms, the attempts of certain neighboring states, primarily Russia, to destabilize the situation in Ukraine using this phenomenon as one of the effective tools of hybrid warfare

Keywords: disinformation, political rusynism, “Russian peace”, Subcarpathian Rus, Carpathian Ukraine, Transcarpathia, national identity

“After the liberation of Transcarpathia by the Soviet troops, the congress of the Orthodox population of the region spoke in favor of the inclusion of Subcarpathian Rus into the RSFSR or directly into the USSR with the rights of a separate Carpathian Rusyn Republic. But this opinion of the people was ignored.”

Vladimir Putin

Introduction

The beginning of the current century added a new concept of “hybrid war” to the list of such modern challenges and threats as “information war”, “nuclear war”, “cold war”, “cyber war”, etc. Today, this concept is understood by many as a synthetic, integrative definition, which includes, on the one hand, active military actions aimed at the physical destruction of the enemy and his manpower, and on the other hand, a complex of certain actions of the aggressor in relation to the victim, the purpose of which is to discredit the latter in the eyes of the world community and its own people as well as to split the political elite and society in general. Such actions can deliver a much stronger blow than a military invasion, since they are aimed at the formation of certain stereotypes and attitudes in the mass consciousness through manipulative influence [1].

Hybrid war uses all types of state power and tools available to it, including disinformation, to impose its will on another state, attacking the weakest points of society’s development, and, accordingly, to achieve its results. The vast majority of authors agree that information warfare is the leading component of hybrid warfare. One of the most powerful tools of hybrid warfare remains systematic disinformation [2].

Researchers of hybrid warfare, particularly, V. Petryk in his article “The essence of information security of the state, society and the individual” [3], note that disinformation and manipulation of information can be achieved through: 1) tendentious presentation of facts (informing, which consists in biased coverage of facts or other information about events with the help of specially selected true data; this method usually involves presenting specially formed information in doses to an ever-increasing

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tension); 2) “reverse” disinformation (provision of true information in a distorted form or in such a situation where it is perceived by the target as false; as a result, a situation arises when the target actually knows true information on the intentions or specific actions of the opposite side, but perceives it inadequately and is not ready to resist negative influence); 3) terminological “mining” (distortion of the primary correct essence of fundamentally important basic terms and interpretations of a global and operational application nature); 4) “gray” disinformation (implies the use of a synthesis of true information with disinformation); 5) “black” disinformation (use of mostly false information)” [3].

It is quite obvious that various means of the war unleashed by Russia against Ukraine includes the theme of “political rusynism” or “neo-rusynism”, the purpose of which is to destabilize the political, national-ethnic and territorial situation in our country, weakening the Ukrainian ethnic group in particular, and the Ukrainian political nation in general, imposing on Ukrainian society the idea of a single or, at least, a triune Russian people, in which the place of Ukrainians should be taken by the Little Russians-Rusyns. The leading place in this destructive process is given to the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine with its historical, linguistic, linguistic and cultural development features.

According to the researchers of rusynism, in particular the historian V. Fenych, “the entire “Transcarpathian history” in intellectual discourses about Ukraine after 1991 is presented in the concepts and methodologies of three historiographical schemes. Two of them are exclusivist or ethnocentric, which are Ukrainian and Ruthenian interpretations, and the other one is an inclusivist or multi-ethnic historiography, which tries to combine different concepts of a multicultural region with “many names” (Transcarpathia, Transcarpathian Rus, Transcarpathian Ukraine, Subcarpathia, Subcarpathian Rus, Upper Hungary, Ruszka Krajna)” [4, p. 70].

According to another Ukrainian researcher, M. Zan, if we take the Ukrainian concept of rusynism into account, we will mainly receive criticism and construction of the newest “meme” called “political rusynism”. On the other hand, he continues, the Rusyn scientific paradigm justifies the ethno-renaissance of its own identity in the new geopolitical situation of Central-Eastern Europe at the end of the 20th – beginning of the 21st century [5, p. 83].

Therefore, the knowledge and understanding of political rusynism, the scale of its possible influence both at the regional and international levels will practically allow, according to the author of this article, various interested structures of Ukraine, including state bodies, to more effectively neutralize and prevent the attempts of some neighboring states, primarily Russia, to destabilize the situation in Ukraine. Actually, this is why the article is relevant to the reader.

The goal of the article is to highlight a series of events that were used and continue to be used by the puppet “leaders” of rusynism and their Russian curators in the direction of the “practical revival of the Rusyn nation” with all the resulting consequences on the territory of

the Transcarpathian region of Ukraine. In a broader sense, the author attempts to show the danger that “marginal” neo-rusynism potentially poses for the Ukrainian state and its neighboring countries, which has essentially turned into one of the important tools of Russia's hybrid war against the democratic countries of Eastern Europe.

Achieving the goal is possible provided that at least three such tasks are solved: 1) clarification of the reasons for the resuscitation of political rusynism on the territory of Ukraine; 2) clarification of the main neo-rusynism movements and their leaders of thought; 3) outlining the main measures to institutionalize the basic ideas of neo-rusynism in Ukraine as elements of a massive Russian hybrid war. Research timeline: 1991-2021.

Formation of Modern Neo-Rusynism in Transcarpathia

The question of Carpathian rusynism or political rusynism does not fit into the framework of some local and temporary phenomenon. This is a long chain of consistent policies of the authorities of various states and politicians regarding the Transcarpathian branch of the Ukrainian nation, which extends from the middle of the 19th century, reaches its peak in the 20s and 30s of the 20th century, and recovers at the end of the last century. Having arisen in the middle of the 19th century in the wake of the “Spring Revolution” in Europe as a result of the political split of Ukrainians in Galicia, political rusynism soon turned into an instrument of ethnic division and territorial fragmentation of the Ukrainian nation and, accordingly, the inclusion of Ukrainian ethnic territories in different historical periods, at least as part of the Austrian and Russian empires, Hungary and Czechoslovakia.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the leaders of neo-rusynism, taking advantage of the favorable political situation in Eastern Europe (the collapse of the Eastern bloc), obtained from the Slovakian government tacit recognition of the Rusyns as a people separate from Ukrainians in exchange for the integrity of this country. Thanks to the financial assistance of the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic, the first so-called World Congress of Rusyns was held in March 1991 in Medzilaborce. This is where the inspired initiative to create a new nation of “Rusyns” came from. Slovakia and its real financial support then also played a leading role in the creation of the so-called “Rusyn language” (international seminar in Bardejovské Kúpele at the end of 1992, codification in Bratislava) [6].

The relay of the official Bratislava, which either naively believed that by dividing Ukrainians and Ruthenians and inventing a “Rusyn language” for the latter forever solved the “Ukrainian question” on its territories and saved the Rusyn-Ukrainian Prešov region from separatism and thereby ensured the inviolability of its borders, was picked up directly by Moscow. The Rusyn map is being reinvented in a hurry by the party-state leadership of the Soviet Union, again with the aim of keeping Ukraine in the “updated” Union of the SSR, which, in the end, did not save it from collapse.

On December 1, 1991, as part of the 1991 Ukrainian independence referendum, according to “official” statistics,

78% of the population of Zakarpattia Oblast allegedly positively supported the question “On the status of Transcarpathia as part of Ukraine” as its autonomous part. The people of Transcarpathia really answered “yes” to the question on the ballot: “Do you want Transcarpathia to be enshrined in the Constitution of Ukraine as a special self-governing territory as a subject within independent Ukraine and not included in any other administrative-territorial entities?”. But at the same time, the survey did not mention any “autonomous territory”. On the contrary, the referendum removed all reservations regarding the liquidation of the Zakarpattia Oblast and the unification of the territory of the region with other western regions of Ukraine into a new entity, provided that administrative and territorial reform will be carried out in the future [7, p. 525].

The results of the referendum soon began to be actively interpreted in their own way by various anti-Ukrainian political forces. Few people today will deny that the main interpreters here were the Transcarpathian party and KGB nomenclature, on the one hand, and the “enlighteners” of the newly formed “Rusyn government” in Slovakia who controlled the Slovak state mass media and Radio Prešov that is geographically close to Uzhhorod, on the other hand. Of course, this coordinated company was conducted by Moscow. The goal of Gorbachev's USSR that was living its last days was obvious – to show Ukraine and, eventually, Georgia (Abkhazia, Adjara, South Ossetia), Moldova (Transnistria), Uzbekistan (Fergana) and even Yeltsin's Russia itself (Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan) that these republics will not be able to exist outside the USSR. They will simply crumble to pieces, and only the Soviet Union was and can continue to be the guarantor of their integrity and prosperity. Czechoslovakia, for its part, also sought to protect itself from possible steps taken by the Rusyn Prešov region aimed at leaving Slovakia. Therefore, the idea of the autonomy of Transcarpathia, but necessarily within Ukraine, completely satisfied it.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Yeltsin's “democratic” Russia, weakened at the time, “forgot” about rusynism for a while. As a prototype of the future “Russian world”, the Russian Federation, at the turn of the century tried through the structures of the CIS to push the so-called single humanitarian space that would ensure the supremacy of the Russian language, literature, culture, and through them the political dominance of the Kremlin on the entire territory of the former Soviet Union. Having strengthened itself, now Putin's Russia, following the best KGB traditions, launched an open attack on everything non-Russian in the post-Soviet countries by implementing the “Russian world” political project based on the experience of centuries of Russian expansion. The purpose of this project was very successfully and succinctly characterized by Lyudmila Putina, the then-wife of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin: “Russia ends where Russian language ends” [8]. V. Putin himself, during the awarding ceremony of the “Russian Geographical Society” in November 2016 unceremoniously and programmatically declared that “the border of Russia does not end anywhere” [9]. In Zakarpattia, Rusyn separatists, local Hungarians and the so-called Russian-speaking population of the region became a strong support for Moscow in the implementation of its plans.

It should be noted that Transcarpathian “political rusynism” was not a single movement from the very beginning, which allows us to understand why the “Rusyn leadership” easily switches its orientation towards different states. Historically, four movements stood out in it: Muscophilic, Magyaronian, Subcarpathian Rusyn (local) and Czechophilic. With the exception of the Czechophile movement, these movements will continue to be represented in the region. In the 2000s, the Muscophile wing was headed by Father Dymytriy (Sydor), a priest of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, the local wing was headed by Yevhen Zhupan, and the Magyar wing, according to some researchers, was led by Hungarian political parties. “Rusynism” was supported by the local regional government, the Society of Hungarian Culture in Transcarpathia, the bishopric of the UOC-MP in Transcarpathia, as well as part of the leadership of the Mukacheve Greek Catholic Diocese led by Bishop Ordinary Ivan Semedi [10].

The adoption by the Zakarpattia Oblast Council on March 7, 2007 of the decision to recognize the nationality of “Rusyns” significantly fueled the separatist forces of the region, at the same time causing opposition from the statist elite of Transcarpathia. In particular, attention was drawn to the fact that although there are more supporters of the Hutsul identity in Ukraine (21,400 people) (compared to about 10,000 Rusyns), “political players do not care about them.” In response to the decision of the Oblast Council, the Rakhiv Raion Council adopted a special decision, in which special emphasis was placed on “preventing speculation on Ukrainian ethnonyms” [11].

It should be noted that Ukrainian researchers of rusynism immediately drew attention to the “artificial identity” of the Ukrainian population of Transcarpathia, formed exclusively by external factors of rusynism as an “anti-Ukrainian political movement.” At the same time, many defined the decision of March 7, 2007 to recognize the nationality of “Rusyns” as a “demarche” of the Zakarpattia Oblast Council in the conditions of the all-Ukrainian political crisis [12]. Some researchers of Transcarpathian “rusynism” associated the socio-political activation of Rusyn NGOs in the region, especially in the mid-2000s, with the political initiatives of Viktor Baloha, head of a powerful political and business group in Transcarpathia. According to their belief, V. Baloga actually has been the coordinator of the Rusyn movement in the region since 2005. With his alleged support, the People's Council of Zakarpattia Rusyns was established with Ye. Zhupan as its head, a decision was made to recognize the nationality of “Rusyns”, and the newspaper “Subcarpathian Rusyn” was financed from the regional budget [13].

Despite everything, the very next year, in 2008, the separatists formed a kind of “parliament” of Subcarpathian Rus – the so-called “Soim of Subcarpathian Rusyns”. Dmytro Sydor, the author, priest of the UOC MP, an active Russophile, supporter of the Third Rome, is mentioned as the head of the Soim. A year earlier, the same “father” Sydor initiated a meeting in Mukacheve called the first “European Congress of Rusyns” held under the watchful eye of the Russian mass media and specifically Moscow television cameras, elected the “prime minister of the

Republic of Subcarpathian Rus" [14]. They chose an unremarkable, familyless and homeless Petro Hetsk, a native of Uzhhorod, who had never heard anything about Rusyns until 1996, worked as a computer technician in one of the libraries. Before that, however, he served in the army, and later graduated from the Moscow Engineering and Technical Institute together with the notorious future "leader of Novorossiya" Oleg Tsaryov. Subsequently, the "prime minister", whom the "ardent Rusyns" themselves perceive as nothing but a buffoon, hid for a while in Moscow, and his "statesmanship" activities were reduced to all kinds of pasquills about Ukraine, which he spread in the Internet [15]. Thanks to "active" search, P. Hetsk managed to find "Rusyns" even in Bukovina.

But in the treacherous year of 2014, namely on March 14, as befits a loyal follower of the "Russian world", he immediately "officially" appealed to the President of Russia V. Putin as the "prime minister of Subcarpathian Rus" to carry out a "peacekeeping operation" in Transcarpathia [16]. According to the plans of D. Sydor, the government of "Subcarpathian Rus" was to be established in Zakarpattia Oblast on April 24, 2014, which the Russian media wrote about at the time. However, the predictions did not come true. In June 2018, in an interview with the Russian "Literaturnaya Gazeta", the "Holy Father" once again called on Moscow to actively reclaim Transcarpathia, "because East Slavic, all-Russian civilization begins from there and extends to Alaska." He urged the Kremlin leaders "Intervene, as this is where Russia's vital interests are" [14].

In 2008, the so-called Soim of Subcarpathian Rusyns and the Council of Zakarpattia Rusyns held the next "European Congress of Rusyns". On October 25 of the same year, the "congressmen" ultimatum stated that if the Ukrainian authorities do not implement the results of the 1991 referendum on the autonomy of Zakarpattia, then the Rusyns will be forced to independently resort to its creation as part of Ukraine. And a year later, at the end of 2009, the poem by the founder of the Transcarpathian Russophile Rusyn movement "Subcarpathian Rusyns" Father Oleksandr Dukhnovych becomes the "official anthem of the "Republic of Subcarpathian Rus" under the name "Long live the Rusyn people!", which at the same time becomes the official anthem of Rusyns of Zakarpattia Oblast approved on December 22 by deputies of the Zakarpattia Oblast Council [17].

We can say that there was the "Rusyns" attempted to create their own, so far virtual, "trained army". On August 23, 2014, the "first national unit" – the Ruthenian battalion named after I.G. Kundri (archimandrite of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Russian Orthodox Church of Ukraine, Jov Ugolsky, a "Carpathian" spiritual missionary). According to "official" Rusyn internet publications, the battalion included volunteers from Zakarpattia Oblast, Prešov Region (Slovakia), Lemko Region (Poland), and Hungary; a total of 337 people under the command of some "commander" Yu.A. Ianzo. The motto of the battalion became "Подкарпатська Русь і Новорусько – навхтема рокаши!", which, translated from another version of the newly born "Rusyn language", which can be seen by this

slogan to "rapidly develop", eloquently means "Subcarpathian Rus and Novorossia – forever together!" [18]. As expected, the battalion turned out to be as fake in reality as the "Republic of Subcarpathian Rus" itself [14].

The so-called "Plan to ensure the federal status of Transcarpathia" developed in Moscow in 2014 was not implemented, and could not be implemented in 2014, according to which on October 15-25, 2014, it was planned to seize administrative buildings, the airport of Uzhhorod, and turn to Kyiv with a proposal to sign a federal agreement. According to the idea of the "prime minister" P. Hetsko, the plan should have been implemented by the "radical units of the Rusyn movement" and the forces of the Hungarian community under the control of the "Movement for a Better Hungary" party. Considerable hopes were placed on the "Rusynska Rudyna" organization ("Rusyn Family"), which was supposed to include about 1,000 people. It was planned to create 4 mobile groups and hold 5-6 protest actions against the policies of the central and local authorities of Ukraine every month [19].

Despite everything, there were still attempts to create paramilitary units, albeit virtual; some experience has been gained. Now the only one thing left is to implement in practice the establishment of the "state of Subcarpathian Rus" or some other "subcarpathian people's republic" proclaimed by a handful of Moscow henchmen. Its political recognition, like the recognition of the "statehood" of Abkhazia or South Ossetia, will obviously not have to wait long, at least from the Kremlin's side. This is clearly evidenced by the personal position of the President of Russia V. Putin. In his "scientific" work "On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians", published in Ukrainian on the website of the Russian president for the first time in history on July 12, 2021, the newly-minted "protector", "father of all peoples and nations" shed a bitter tear regarding the hard fate of Subcarpathian Rusyns. "I will speak separately about the fate of Subcarpathian Rus, which ended up in Czechoslovakia after the collapse of Austria-Hungary. A significant part of local residents were Rusyns. This is rarely mentioned now, but after the liberation of Transcarpathia by the Soviet troops, the congress of the Orthodox population of the region spoke in favor of the inclusion of Subcarpathian Rus into the RSFSR or directly into the USSR with the rights of a separate Carpathian Rusyn Republic. But this opinion of the people was ignored. And in the summer of 1945, it was announced, as the Pravda newspaper wrote, about the historic act of reunification of Transcarpathian Ukraine "with its ancient homeland, Ukraine", he writes [20].

V. Putin's article, both in its entirety and in the part concerning Transcarpathia, serves as a classic example of "gray" disinformation, i.e. the use of a synthesis of true information with disinformation used in hybrid warfare. Let's try to prove it.

First of all, V. Putin uses facts that are generally known to the general public and are beyond dispute: 1) he uses the term Subcarpathian Rus that was also used by official Prague in the pre-war years (the term Transcarpathian Ukraine is not used deliberately); 2) he mentions the well-known fact of the disintegration of Austria-Hungary that for a long time included the Transcarpathian region; 3) he

emphasizes that Transcarpathia was liberated from fascist occupation by Soviet troops (although it is not specified that these were troops of the 4th Ukrainian Front staffed mainly by Ukrainian prisoners). These facts create an initial general background that signals in the mind of an average person that this information is trustworthy.

The second set of reliable information includes facts generally known to the public, but the meaning of which is understood by a much smaller number of people. As a rule, it concerns a trained category of specialists, namely: 1) the population of Transcarpathia is identified as “Rusyns”, which for a Russian or a person with a Soviet mentality is consonant with the word “Russian”. At the same time, the fact is omitted that such a definition was imposed by the authorities of Hungary and Czechoslovakia in order to keep Transcarpathia as part of their states (if they would have called the Rusyns Ukrainians, the question of their territorial affiliation would immediately arise) 2) the focus is made on the Orthodox faith of the Rusyns, which the average person associates to a large extent with the Rusyn (Russian) Orthodox Church. But at the same time, there are no mentions of the fact that the pre-war Transcarpathia was canonically subject to the Serbian Orthodox Church (Mukacheve- Prešov eparchy); 3) the “convention” of the population of the region is mentioned, which ordinary citizens know about only in general terms.

This type of information, limited or dosed to a certain extent, is aimed at consolidating the veracity of the information offered in general in the human mind.

And, finally, the third key set is the introduction of outright disinformation, which determines the main goal of V. Putin’s article – to consolidated in people’s minds, in our case regarding Transcarpathia, that this region was unfairly, against the will of its inhabitants, the Rusyns, was included in the territory of Ukraine, and the Rusyns themselves were forced to recognize themselves as Ukrainians. It is about the allegedly ignored decision of the congress to ask the leadership of the USSR to include “Subcarpathian Rus” in the Soviet Union as a union republic, or in the Russian Federation as an autonomous republic. The calculation here was made precisely on the fact that the majority of its population does not know the details of the “congress of the Orthodox population”, and therefore, based on the two previous sets of information, it will believe this set as well.

Of course, real documentary facts are deliberately omitted here. Let’s read an article in the diplomatic dictionary published in Moscow in 1986 in Russian language under the editorship of the world-reputable USSR Minister of Foreign Affairs A.A. Gromyko: “The 1945 Treaty on Carpatho-Ukraine was signed on June 29 in Moscow and entered into force on January 30, 1946. It was concluded in accordance with the general desire of the population of Carpathian Ukraine expressed in the Manifesto of the first Mukacheve Congress of People’s Committees (November 26, 1944). It established that Carpatho-Ukraine (which was mentioned as Subcarpathian Rus in the Czechoslovak constitution), a region that was included in the Czechoslovak Republic as an autonomous unit on the basis of the 1919 Saint-Germain Peace Treaty “reunites in accordance with the

desire expressed by the population of Carpatho-Ukraine, and on the basis of a friendly agreement... of the parties, with its old motherland – Ukraine, and is included in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic” [21].

It is hard to believe that the professional intelligence officer V. Putin knew nothing about these historical facts or historical-geographical terms. But, contrary to these realities, at the end of his disinformation throw-in, he makes a true reference to an article in the main Soviet newspaper “Pravda” about the inclusion of Transcarpathia in Ukraine, which only strengthens the feeling of “injustice” regarding this region. Against the background of other “historical” textbooks of the Russian propaganda machine, the average Russian or post-Soviet citizen gets the impression of the existence of an artificial entity – Ukraine, which was created by Russia from Russian Donbas, Russian Novorossiia, the Russian Black Sea Region, Russian Transcarpathia and, in the end, Little Russia, together with Kyiv, which is the “mother of Russian cities.”

So, as the logical conclusion follows, it is necessary to correct these historical mistakes and “satisfy the aspirations of the people” (in fact, V. Putin openly and cynically announced Russia’s new territorial claims to Ukraine). After all, the wider the halo of Russianness in the world, the stronger Russia is, the more it influences world processes, decides the fate of political regimes in neighboring countries, including Slavic countries, among which Russia, according to the Kremlin, has historically played and is obliged to continue to play a key role, the role of patron, liberator and defender from everything “foreign”. Because this is her fate, the fate of the Third Rome.

In Russia itself, Moscow actively uses the “Rusinskiy Mir” information portal in its outreach with people from Zakarpattia. It was created in 2020 specifically for “Rusyns who live and work on the territory of Russia.” Phone numbers and addresses are published for the visiting residents of Zakarpattia to contact if they have problems with the police, migration services, job search, etc. [22].

However, returning to “rusynism” as a definition of “nationality”, Russian masterminds increasingly dislike the word “Rusyn”, since it, although being consonant with the word “Russian”, is already very attached to the word “Ukrainian”. And, as you know, the words “Ukrainian” and “Rusyn” for Ukrainians are synonymous. Hence, the Rusyn puppets of Moscow are beginning to use the term “Rusian” or “Rusyn (Rusian)” more and more often in order to put an end to any Ukrainian associations forever. And this, for its part, should additionally confirm the thesis that Ukraine “occupied” and forcibly “Ukrainized” the entire nation of “Rusians” in Transcarpathia! Therefore, the demand of the “Rusians” to both the Ukrainian government and world leaders to protect it from denationalization, preserve its identity, which can be done at least by granting autonomy to Subcarpathian Rus (at least to begin with), appears to be quite “fair”. As one of the leading “Rusians”, the head of the Rusyn community in Moscow “Karpatskaya Rus” Mikhail Dronov, emphasized, “Thank God some of the Moscow Rusyn priests help us in this” [23].

It should be noted that expectations placed here upon certain political circles in Hungary as well. According

to the words of the “prime minister” mentioned by the author, P. Hetsko: “We will receive help from Hungary. Hungarian nationalists are one of the toughest nationalists in Europe. In all respects. We expect help, including physical and military training... We don't expect it, we are confident in it. Any help: military, material, personal.”

At the same time, the Russian news agency “Anti-fascist” noted that “the words of the political leader of the Rusyns are partly confirmed by the recent statement of the leader of the right-wing radical party “Jobbik” Vona Gábor that the leadership of the Hungarian party held negotiations in Moscow last week with the aim of gaining support for the creation of autonomy (in Ukraine – author) for Hungarians and Rusyns” [15]. P. Hetsko's statement echoed the statements made at the time by the Vice Prime Minister of Hungary, Zsolt Semjén, about the need to create autonomy for local Hungarians in the Zakarpattia Oblast of Ukraine [14]. Perhaps this also explains the stormy negative reaction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary and its head Péter Szijjártó in September-October 2017 to the new Law “On Education” approved by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, which, among other things, allows the Hungarians of Zakarpattia Oblast, to learn the Ukrainian language along with their native Hungarian language and to integrate normally into Ukrainian society.

But what about “Great Hungary”? Isn't this why the Hungarian government, in the form of undisguised blackmail, openly declared that it will block (and blocks) all Ukrainian European integration and Euro-Atlantic projects, and will even try to revise the Agreement on the Association of Ukraine with the EU, if Ukraine does not abandon its nationally oriented, state-building Ukrainian educational policy [24]. Everything will now depend on whether Ukraine is ready to defend its national interests, or whether it will once again agree to “sleep through” this region in favor of some one-time benefits, as has already happened with Crimea and the Donetsk region.

Political Rusynism as an Element of the Russian Hybrid War Against the Countries of Eastern Europe

Returning to the question of the “successful solution” of political rusynism in Slovakia, it is quite possible to assert that at one time the Soviet-Russian special services conducted a subtle, essentially jewelry operation to de-Ukrainize the population of Prešov region, executed by the hands of the Slovak special services, brought up in the best traditions of the KGB of the USSR, and former Slovak party officials who hastily shifted their ground towards democrats, nurtured and selected with the consent of the CPSU for the leadership of the Czechoslovak SSR. This was done with the help of old and new, outwardly loyal “Rusyn” leaders.

Did the current Ukraine contribute to such a state? We must state that it did, at least due to misunderstanding and underestimation of the importance of autochthonous Ukrainian identity in neighboring states. At first it was done passively, and later practically. In 2010, immediately after V. Yanukovich's team came to power, state Ukrainian diplomatic institutions accredited in the places

of compact residence of Ukrainians in neighboring countries were liquidated, namely the consulates general in Prešov (Slovakia), Tulcea (Romania), Tyumen (Russia) as well as Varna (Bulgaria). A number of other consular offices were downgraded from the consulate general to the level of a consulate, such as in Brest (Belarus). Hopes that the situation with the Ukrainian presence in these states would be corrected after the Revolution of Dignity did not come true. This is despite the fact that neighboring countries, with the exception of Russia for obvious reasons, are actively expanding their institutional diplomatic presence in Ukraine and, first of all, in the western regions of our country.

However, it seems that the Slovak competent high-ranking officials of that time, as well as the Polish, Romanian and even some of the Ukrainian officials at the time, did not realize enough and continue to be oblivious of who they actually play with. The secret plans of the Rusyn leaders, who speak blasphemously about the so-called “Rusyn people”, the “Rusian” people, or about the realization of Rusyn statehood, even in a limited autonomous form, always concern the most important interests not only of Ukraine, but also of Slovakia (Prešov Region), Poland (Subcarpathian and Lesser Poland Voivodeships) and Romania (Maramureș Region), where Ukrainians-Rusyns-Lemkas historically live on their ethnic lands. All the more so as “faithful” Moscow, as already mentioned, was and remains a reliable ally of the Rusyn leaders in this issue.

The Rusyn leaders also have some support in the current Czech Republic, which obviously has not fully learned the “Rusyn lessons” from its pre-war history. On its territory, the “Russian Prize” foundation with its headquarters in Prague operates quietly funded by the international “Russian world” fund created by the decree of V. Putin's. The “Russian Prize” Foundation is headed by Alexandr Gegalczij, a native of Uzhhorod, who is a “persona non grata” in Ukraine for openly supporting the annexation of Crimea and the occupation of part of Donbas. Until 2014, in the theater hall in Uzhhorod, this “figure” solemnly organized annual prize awarding ceremonies for the prize winners of this fund, which he continued to do in Prague. In 2014, he left Ukraine and settled in Prague, received citizenship of the Czech Republic, and launched active pro-Russian activities funded by the Kremlin. In particular, Mr. Hehalchyi created the “Friends of Russian Crimea” community, whose members attended events in the occupied Crimea and were observers at the pseudo-elections in Luhansk [22].

Oddly enough, the problem of Rusynism in the early 2000s also affected Moldova, where a Ukrainian community of several hundred thousand resides compactly, of whom at least half are autochthonous Ukrainians from Transnistria. It is clear that Russia could not ignore this important fact, which significantly strengthened the role of Ukraine as a state in this strategically important region of Europe, because Moldova is called the gateway to the Balkans not for nothing. It became more and more difficult for the Kremlin to hold Moldova using the separatist regime in Tiraspol, since the Ukrainian community of Transnistria at that time played not the least role in the political life of this region. The same applied to the North

of Moldova, the industrially developed part of the Republic of Moldova, where a large part of the Ukrainian population of Moldova is also concentrated.

And so, as a solution to this inconvenient problem for Russia, the Kremlin proposed a “genius” solution: to convince the Moldovan Ukrainians in various ways that the Ukrainians of Moldova are not Ukrainians at all, but exclusively Rusyns, which is supported by “historical facts.” It should be noted that the active propaganda carried out in Moldova by all possible Russian horns in connection with the Moldavian communists, who were in power at the time, began to give “positive” results [25]. As some heads of state administrations in the northern regions of Moldova testified, a certain number of people believed Russian propaganda, began to renounce their Ukrainian affiliation and consider themselves Rusyns. The goal of the denationalization of Ukrainians was also acceptable to the then official Chişinău (the next step involved further Moldavianization, and ultimately possible Romanianization of the local Ukrainian population). For Russia, the main thing was to turn the Ukrainians of Moldova into a stateless “Russian-speaking” population of *manкурts*, into its fifth column through political rusynism, in which the Kremlin generally succeeded, as evidenced by the current inert attitude of Moldovan Ukrainians towards Russian aggression in Ukraine.

Maps drawn by political provocateurs, as if it was a joke, always cover a part of “their” Rusyn lands in the modern territories of the mentioned states. Russia plays an important role in this. By encouraging separatism on the “Russian” Zakerzonian, the Kremlin will be able to easily manipulate and often manipulates the governments of these states, offering in exchange its services for the settlement of conflict situations provoked by it, not necessarily involving bloodshed – it is enough to inflate the so-called problem of historical memory, violation of the rights of indigenous peoples and national minorities, etc. As shown by the events of recent decades, Russia has extremely rich experience of “peacemaking”.

Conclusions and Suggestions on Possible Steps for Deactualization of Political Rusynism in Ukraine

Summarizing the information presented, the author thinks it is possible to highlight several main stages of Russia's involvement of the “new rusynism” in a hybrid war against Ukraine, as well as its use of neighboring states for this purpose, namely:

1. The end of the 80s- 1991 – resuscitation of political rusynism by the party leadership of the USSR in order to prevent the Ukrainian SSR from leaving the Soviet Union; establishment and encouragement of the KGB-controlled separatist movement on the territory of Zakarpattia Oblast.
2. 1991-2007 – strengthening the influence of the Russian Federation in Zakarpattia by skillfully encouraging the local political and business elite to use the territorial and ethno-linguistic designation of “rusynism” as a way for them (the elite) to preserve their positions in the region.
3. 2007-2014 – the incorporation of the Rusyn “question” into the Russian concept of the so-called “Russian

world” and the formation under the supervision of Russia of the virtual Rusyn “state of Subcarpathian Rus”; approbation by the Russian special services of actions related to the destabilization of the situation in Zakarpattia Oblast in particular and in Ukraine as a whole by Rusyn “statesmen” subordinate to them.

4. 2014-2021 – public declaration by the top state leadership of Russia of the need for a “fair” solution to the “Rusyn problem” in Ukraine based on the concept of “Russian world”.

And, finally, one more conclusion is that today Russia, through the manipulation of the “Rusyn question”, which is artificially fueled by destructive information on the part of Russian and pro-Russian international propaganda channels, receives additional levers of influence on the situation, and even the support of certain political circles and figures in countries neighboring Ukraine, primarily in Hungary, as well as in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, Romania and Moldova.

The summary of the work and the corresponding conclusions easily bring the author to the question: “Is Ukraine now ready to effectively oppose political rusynism?”. The answer is obvious: “Of course yes, although this will not be easy.” In the opinion of the author, this requires carrying out at least seven steps with consistent persistence:

1. Developing a separate integrated state program for the sustainable development of the Zakarpattia Oblast, taking into account all its local features, which will give the political, security, legal, etc. leveling of rusynism as a political phenomenon a prominent place (currently, the development of Zakarpattia Oblast is provided within the framework of the State Program for the Development of the Ukrainian Carpathian Region for 2020-2022 that is common to the Carpathian regions of Ukraine, and within the framework of the Oblast Regional Strategy for the Development of Zakarpattia Oblast for 2021-2027).

2. Restoring the diplomatic (consular) presence of Ukraine in places with concentrated population of Ukrainians in neighboring states, primarily in Prešov (Slovakia) and Tulcea (Romania); initiating the activity of the “Ukrainian Institute” on these and other historical Ukrainian lands.

3. Developing and adopting a separate state program for the support of autochthonous Ukrainians abroad, where the main emphasis is made not on the traditional financial support of Ukrainian-Rusyn communities, but on the real image component of the political, economic, historical and cultural life of local Rusyns as an autochthonous component of Ukrainians abroad.

4. It is expedient for Ukrainian diplomacy to direct the vector of political rusynism against their own masterminds and preachers, actively using international bilateral and multilateral formats and platforms for this purpose in their national interests. The political statements of the leadership of Russia, Hungary or other countries, as well as the most odious “leaders” of modern neo-rusynism, regarding the situation around the “Rusyns” in Transcarpathia, should become a strong proof of destructive interference, primarily by Russia, in the internal affairs of Ukraine and its neighboring states. Any use of political rusynism by foreign politicians that harm Ukraine should be recorded

and become, along with other crimes against Ukraine, the subject of consideration by international courts.

5. The tragic pages of the history of the Rusyns-Ukrainians, primarily connected in time with Carpatho-Ukraine, should also serve as an obvious argument in favor of Ukraine in the process of settling “sensitive” historical, linguistic, cultural and other issues with Hungary, Poland and Romania.

6. Transcarpathia, as a unique historical and cultural heritage of Ukraine, deserves to occupy one of the central places in the cultural and humanitarian space of Ukraine, along with Transnistria and Galicia (the same applies equally to almost all regions of Ukraine).

7. Ukrainian law enforcement and other competent bodies, if necessary, in cooperation with the relevant bodies of neighboring countries, should prevent and neutralize any manifestations of the activities of the proteges of political rusynism within the framework of the current legislation of Ukraine and international treaties with further reasoned coverage of such activities in the mass media.

Of course, no one in Ukraine, just as in any other civilized state, can forbid a person to define their regional affiliation and, accordingly, to present themselves as a Lemko, Boyko, Hutsul, Dnieprian, Galician, Volyniak, Podolyak,

Rusyn, Poltavian, Polishchuk, Bukovinian, Chornomorets etc., to develop local traditions, to be proud of their small homeland, etc. On the contrary, careful treatment, preservation and development of the cultural, religious, historical and natural heritage of all Ukrainian lands, all ethnic branches of the united Ukrainian people make Ukraine and the Ukrainian nation unique and recognizable in the world with its uniqueness, diversity and originality.

The author also hopes that no one in Ukraine, regardless of nationality, be it Ukrainian, Belarusian, Hungarian, Romanian, Pole or Russian, everyone who perceives Ukrainian land as their native land, who is actually a citizen of Ukraine and is aware of their belonging to the united Ukrainian political nation, will not allow various domestic and foreign politicians, who are being fed from the hands of Ukraine's enemies, to use organic regional differences to the detriment of our state and the Ukrainian people. With this good aim, the author tried to draw the special attention of the Ukrainian public with this article, on the one hand, to Russia's new specific territorial claims against Ukraine (Zakarpattia this time), and on the other hand, to “political rusynism” as a powerful ideological weapon of anti-Ukrainian adherents in achieving the goal set by their curators.

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Політичне неорусинство як елемент російської гібридної війни щодо України та країн Східної Європи

Анотація. Початок XXI століття додав до переліку сучасних викликів та загроз таке нове поняття як «гібридна війна». Гібридна війна, як стверджує автор статті, використовує усі види влади держави та наявні у неї інструменти, серед яких дезінформація, щоб нав’язати свою волю іншій державі, нападаючи на найслабші точки розвитку суспільства, і відповідно, досягти своїх результатів. З розпадом Радянського Союзу, а особливо з початком російської агресії проти Української держави, питання «політичного русинства», як елемента гібридної війни, стало сьогодні дієвим інструментом шантажу з боку Росії багатьох країн Центральної та Східної Європи. За словами автора статті, це окрім України, стосується Словаччини, Польщі, Румунії, а також Молдови, де проживає велика україно-русинська громада. Питання протидії сучасним викликам і загрозам, серед яких політичне русинство, вимагає більш уважного вивчення цієї проблеми. Представлена стаття має на меті коротко висвітлити основні причини реанімації політичного русинства на території України, виявити наявність сучасних неорусинських течій та їх провідних ідеологів, а також викласти основні заходи з інституалізації базових ідей неорусинства в Україні як елементів масованої російської гібридної війни. Автор демонструє історичний зв’язок між використанням Росією русинства та сучасною ситуацією в регіоні. На думку автора, глибоке розуміння природи політичного русинства дозволить різним зацікавленим інституціям України, зокрема державним органам, ефективно нейтралізувати та запобігати, в тому числі в рамках багатоформатних міжнародних платформ, спробам окремих сусідніх держав, насамперед Росії, дестабілізувати ситуацію в Україні, використовуючи це явище як один із ефективних інструментів гібридної війни

Ключові слова гібридна війна, дезінформація, русинство, політичне русинство, «русский мир», Підкарпатська Русь, Карпатська Україна, Закарпаття, національна ідентичність