

# IMPROVING THE SITUATION OF THE RUTHENIAN MINORITY IN SERBIA\*

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**Abstract:** *The author deals with several factors that undoubtedly influence and improve the life conditions of the Ruthenian / Rusyn national community in Serbia / Vojvodina at the beginning of the third millennium. The factors are: National Council of the Rusyn National Minority; Institute for Culture of the Vojvodinian Ruthenians; Apostolic Exarchate for Greek Catholics in Serbia and Montenegro; Ruthenian-language educational vertical; Internet; new cultural organizations and manifestations; revolutionary changes in the Carpathian Area; favourable international conditions etc.*

*Being recognized administratively the Ruthenian minority enjoys as high degree of self-government as possible. Legislative, executive and judicial bodies exercise power in all areas in which the language and cultural rights of the Ruthenian minority are especially important. This applies particularly to education, culture, media and local authorities.*

**Key-words:** *minority; administration; minority rights; factors of preservation; educational plans.*

## 1. Introduction

The 1981 European Parliament Resolution on a Community Charter of Regional Languages and Cultures and on a Charter of Rights of Ethnic Minorities, requested national, regional and local authorities to allow and promote the instruction of regional languages and cultures in official curricula from nursery school up to university level; to allow and to ensure sufficient access to local radio and television; and to ensure that individuals are allowed to use their own language in the field of

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public life and social affairs in their dealings with official bodies and in the courts (para. 1). The Resolution recommended, furthermore, that the regional funds should provide assistance for projects designed to support regional and folk cultures and regional economic projects (paras. 4 and 6). Finally, Parliament called on the Commission to review all Community legislation or practices which discriminate against minority languages (para. 5) (Toggenburg, 2000, p. 4). Since Yugoslavia / Serbia has implemented the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages the Ruthenian language has been given special protection under Part III of the Charter (together with Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Hungarian, Romani, Romanian, Slovak and Ukrainian).

Several categories of languages other than official languages can be identified in the European Union and its member states: a) minority languages specific to a region of one or more member states; b) languages spoken by a minority in one member state but which are official languages in another EU country; c) non-territorial minority languages; d) non-indigenous languages – languages of recent emigrants who came to EU-member states as “Gastarbeiter”; e) dialects of official or minority languages (Šmihula, 2008, p. 52). The Ruthenian language belongs to the a) category together with Basque, Breton, Catalan etc.

The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina attained extensive rights of self-rule under the 1974 Yugoslav constitution, which defined Vojvodina as one of the subjects of the eight subjects of the Yugoslav federation. At the same time five of the Vojvodina’s peoples were given the status of official nationalities – Serbs, Hungarians, Romanians, Slovaks, and Ruthenians. Consequently, the Ruthenian language became one of the five official languages of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. This meant that for the first time it was possible to use the Ruthenian language in court, in offices, on public signs etc. Translators were employed at state expense in municipalities where there was a significant number of the members of the Ruthenian national community (Φejca, 2010, p. 118).

The author has chosen the topic to point out, on the one hand, that the Ruthenians had attained extensive minority rights even before the European Parliament requested national authorities to allow and promote the instruction of regional languages and cultures in official curricula from nursery school up to university level and, on the other hand, that Serbian legislation is fully consistent with the guidelines specified in the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, drafted by the Council of Europe, and the Ruthenians have obtained a large amount of assurance that the minority rights in the areas of education, culture, information, and official use of the Ruthenian language and alphabet will be, at least to a significant extent, respected.

The article consists of two main parts. In the first part the author provides the historical background and in the second one he discusses the improvement of the situation of the Ruthenian minority at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in Serbia / Vojvodina.

## ***2. Historical background***

For centuries the Ruthenians / Rusyns lived within the borders of Hungarian Kingdom. They lived in the northeast Hungarian counties, namely, in Zemplén, Saros, Abauj-Torna, Borsod, Szabolcs, Ung, Ugocsa, Maramaros and Gemér. Most of these counties are today in Eastern Slovakia, and others in Hungary, Ukraine and Romania. They have called themselves or have been called by others – like Carpatho-Rusyn, Carpatho-Russian, Uhro-Rusyn, Ruthen, Ruthenian, Rusnak, etc. Some 260 years ago, groups of Rusyns began migrating south from their homeland in the Carpathian Mountains to the Srem and Bačka regions of what is now Vojvodina in Serbia and Eastern Slavonia in Croatia.

After the defeat and retreat of the Ottoman Empire from Bačka, Srem and Banat in 1699, the Austro-Hungarian authorities needed more population in the south of their state and supported colonization of Germans, Hungarians, Slovaks and others, among them Rusyns as well (Gavrilović, 1977, p. 153). That is why the ancestors of the Vojvodina Rusyns, citizens of free status under Habsburg Monarchy («Ruthenus Libertinus», as they were called) and of Greek-Catholic (Uniate) faith, in total number of around 2.000 were allowed to settle under the contract with the state authorities in the »dessolata possessio Keresztur« and nearby locality of Kucura in the central Bačka region in the mid of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Хорњак, 2006, p. 25).

In the new world, the newcomers built houses, economic establishments, churches, schools and other public institutions.

The Ruski Krstur parish was founded in 1751, and the Ruski Krstur primary school began to work in 1753. The first Greek-Catholic church in Kucura was built in 1765. The Ruski Krstur and Kucura parishes were included in the Križevci Bishopric for Greek-Catholics in 1777. Before that the parishes had been parts of the Kaloča Catholic Archbishopric. The Ruthenians had become Uniates (Greek-Catholics from 1772) by the Brest (1596) and Užhorod (1646) unions.

The primary school in Šid began to work in 1818, in Novi Sad – in 1823, in Bačinci – in 1847, and in Djurdjevo – in 1880.

Ever since the first Ruthenians settled in these parts and up to the First World War, they were predominantly farmers. Their craftsmen were organized in a guild, while there were very few priests and teachers. In time, the Ruthenians even made progress in their economic, national and cultural life. They succeeded in preserving their identity. They formed their language and raised it to the level that they could use

it to print books. The first book in the Ruthenian language is the poetic wreath *Z Mojoho Valala / From My Village* by Havrijil Kosteljnjk published in 1904.

At the end of the First World War the Austro-Hungarian Empire collapsed. All branches of the Rusyn people had, until the year 1918, lived and developed within the framework of a single state, the Habsburg Monarchy. Now for the first time several branches of the Rusyn people were somehow cut off. The Rusyns in Bačka had to find their own way.

Within Serbia (or the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians, or, later, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia), the Ruthenians were permitted to form national and cultural institutions by virtue of the collective rights of all national minorities, which was not the case in their homeland. They were granted the status of national minority of Slavic origin in 1919, first and for many years to come the only one among their kinsmen in the Carpathian area. This was an event of utmost importance which opened the way of their national and cultural development.

### ***3. Cultural-educational development***

Under such circumstances the Ruthenians felt that the founding of the Ruthenian Popular Educational Society, the so-called Prosvita / Education, was the first step in which they manifested their striving for an independent national cultural life. At the founding meeting, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of July 1919 in Novi Sad, the Ruthenian national community decided to elevate its colloquial language (not the Russian or Ukrainian languages) to the level of a literary language. The first cultural-educational organization adopted resolution to use its everyday speech in the education, cultural life and the press. This decision was based on the fact that books of religious and literary character had already been published in this language (Medješi, 1993, p. 146). The most important figure of the historical meeting was priest Mihajlo Mudri (Фейса, 2004, pp. 374-375).

The first Ruthenian cultural organization published several books of great significance. The most influential book of the time was the first Ruthenian grammar *Hramatika Bačvansko-Ruskej Bešedi / Grammar of Bačka-Rusyn Speech* by Havrijil Kosteljnjk published in 1923 (Fejsa, 2000, p. 277). The Ruthenian Popular Educational Society published calendars (1921-1941), journals *Ruski Novini / Ruthenian Newspaper*, 1924; *Naša Zahradka / Our Garden*, 1937) and other publications (*Bukvar / Primer*, textbooks, *Jeftajova Dzivka / Jeftaj's Daughter* by Havrijil Kosteljnjk – the first Ruthenian non-one-act play, 1924, *Pupče / Field Poppy* by Janko Fejsa – the first Ruthenian collection of children poems, 1929). One of the most important things the RPES did was the foundation of the first Ruthenian printing house in 1936 in Ruski Krstur.

The second cultural-educational organization, the Cultural-Education Union of Yugoslav Ruthenians, the so-called Zarja / Beam, was founded on the 3rd of September 1933 in Vrbas (Фейса, 2008, p. 92). The members of the CEUYR were dissatisfied with the Ukrainophile tendencies of the RPES. They promoted the idea that the Vojvodinian Rusyns, like all Rusyns, were a branch of the Russian nationality (Magocsi, 2002: 510). The organization published calendars (1935-1941), newspapers and other publications. The most influential book of the CEUYR was the first Ruthenian history *Istorija Rusckoho Naroda / History of the Russian People* (1935) by Nikolaj D. Olejarov.

After the Second World War, in 1945, several important cultural events took place. First, the first high school in the Ruthenian language was established in Ruski Krstur. Second, a new Ruthenian organization was established for all Ruthenians in Yugoslavia – Ruska Matka / Ruthenian Home. Third, the Newspaper-Publishing Institution Ruske slovo was established (published: *Ruske Slovo / Ruthenian Word*, 1945; *Ruski Kalendar / Ruthenian Calendar*, 1946; *Zahradka / Garden*, 1947; *Švetlosc / Light*, 1952).

In the following two decades with liberal funding from the Yugoslav government, elementary and secondary school system and radio programming (1948) came into being.

The Institute for Publishing Textbooks was established in 1965. The Institute started to publish textbooks for primary and secondary school regularly. It has published around 1,000 titles.

The Autonomous Province of Vojvodina gained extensive rights of self-rule under the 1974 Constitution and the Ruthenians were given the status of an official nationality. The Ruthenian language became one of the five official languages of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

The Society for the Ruthenian Language and Literature (established in 1970) started to publish its herald the *Tvorčosc / Creativity* (1975), later the *Studia Ruthenica* (1988). A series of school grammars and *Gramatika Rusckoho Jazika / Grammar of the Ruthenian Language* (Кочиш, 1977) were prepared by Mikola Kočiš, that is by the Institute for Publishing Textbooks. Mikola Kočiš is also the author of the first *Pravopis Rusckoho Jazika / Orthographic Rule-Book of the Ruthenian Language* (Кочиш, 1971).

TV programming in Ruthenian came into being in 1975.

It is important to point out that everything from the previous, post-war period was preserved and even improved. Especially it concerns the field of education. The Department of the Žarko Zrenjanin High School from Vrbas became the Educational Centre Petro Kuzmjak in Ruski Krstur (1977). All subjects in one class out of three of the unique high school have been taught in Ruthenian.

The Ruthenian language is also taught in the three primary schools. The whole teaching process is in Ruthenian in the Petro Kuzmjak Primary School in Ruski Krstur (Primary and High School Petro Kuzmjak, since 1990; Primary and Secondary School with Home for Students Petro Kuzmjak, since 1990), whereas it is bilingual, Serbian and Ruthenian, in the Bratstvo jedinstvo / Brotherhood and Unity Primary School in Kucura and the Jovan Jovanović Zmaj Primary School in Đurđevo. All subjects in these primary schools are taught in Ruthenian.

In order to enhance further knowledge and use of the Ruthenian language, in 1973 – the Professorship of the Ruthenian Language, and by 1981 – the Department of the Ruthenian Language and Literature was established at the University of Novi Sad (Фейса, 2006, p. 35).

The creative potential of the Ruthenians had resulted in doubtlessly notable results in culture and education. The readers for elementary and secondary schools in Ruthenian (printed after 1984) prove that the Ruthenians in Yugoslavia were neither an exotic culture nor cultural outskirts. In fact, by their educational and academic maturity, they are in the very centre of European trends and achievements.

Generally speaking, it was the most favourable period for the Ruthenian culture. It can be said that the period presented the golden age for the Ruthenians.

The Newspaper-Publishing Institution Ruske slovo published more books in the Ruthenian language than ever. It even started to publish a journal for young people named MAK / YAC (Youth – Activity – Creativity, since 1972) regularly.

The ethnocultural development of the Ruthenian culture was interrupted during the mid-1990s war in former Yugoslavia. Hyperinflation paralyzed the whole country. Dissolution of Yugoslavia followed.

As far as the Ruthenian national community is concerned Yugoslavia / Serbia continued to admit existence of Ruthenian minority and tried to preserve everything that had been achieved.

#### **4. Minority rights**

Nowadays the Republic of Serbia adopted international standards concerning national minorities rights. The two most important international documents of the Council of Europe signed by our country are the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (signed by the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2005) and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (signed by the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 2001). The essence of these documents has been incorporated in the 2006 Constitution of the Republic of Serbia.

The 2006 Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, in its Article 75, guarantees collective minority rights on the basis of which persons belonging to national minorities, directly or through their representatives take part in decision-making or decide by themselves on specific issues related to their culture, education, information and official use of the language and script, in accordance with the Law. The Constitution incorporates all the relevant international documents concerning minorities.

The members of the Ruthenian minority have the right to be educated in their native language and to attend classes that focus on the minority's history and culture and at the same time the parallel teaching in the Serbian language is compulsory.

The members of the Ruthenian minority are entitled to officially use their language within the municipality or locality in which they form 15 % of the local population. The Law also provides for the official use of the Ruthenian language in judicial procedures, as well as for electoral materials. The Ruthenian minority is granted the right to name streets and other topographical indicators in its language. In areas where the Ruthenian minority makes up to 15 % of local population the state's legislation is to be issued in the Ruthenian language.

One of the noteworthy provisions is the right granted to members of national minorities to freely establish and maintain relations with legal subjects resident in foreign states, with those to which they bear some collective, cultural, linguistic or religious similarities.

The state is also obliged to finance the main cultural activities organized by the members of a national minority. For financing cultural projects the organizers are encouraged to seek funding from private and state's organizations and institutions based abroad.

Nowadays the broadest cultural activity of the Ruthenian national community takes place within the framework of around twenty nonpolitical cultural-educational-artistic organizations and institutions. Nationally, the most important cultural-educational organizations are: Ruska Matka / Ruthenian Home, established in 1945, re-established in 1990 in Ruski Krstur; Društvo za Ruski Jazik, Literaturu i Kulturu / Society for the Ruthenian Language, Literature and Culture, established in 1970 in Novi Sad; Kulturno-Prosvitne Društvo DOK – Kocur / Cultural-Educational Society DOC – Kucura, established in 2006 in Kucura. Other cultural-artistic organizations or associations of citizens are located in Novi Sad (Ruske Kulturno-Prosvitne Društvo / Ruthenian Cultural-Educational Society, Matka – Društvo Rusnacoh Novoho Sadu – Vojvodini / Home – Society of the Ruthenians of Novi Sad – Vojvodina, Forum Mladih Ruskej Matki / Youth Forum of the Ruthenian Home, NVO Ruski Forum GEA / NGO Ruthenian Forum GEA), Kucura (KUD Žatva / CAS Harvest, Etno Klub Odnjate od Zabuca / Ethno Club Brought out of Oblivion), Đurđevo (KUD Taras Ševčenko / CAS

Taras Ševčenko, Hor Rozanov / Rosanov Choir), Vrbas (KPD Karpati / CES the Carpathians, Umetnjicka kolonija Njaradi / Art Colony Njaradi), Ruski Krstur (NVO Mladih Rusnacoh Pact Ruthenorum / NGO of Young Ruthenians Pact Ruthenorum), Šid (KPD Đura Kiš / CES Đura Kiš), Novo Orahovo (KUD Petro Kuzmjak / CAS Petro Kuzmjak), Kula (RKUD Dr Havrijil Kosteljnik / RCAS Dr. Havrijil Kosteljnik), Subotica (Društvo Rusnacoh u Subotici / Society of the Ruthenians in Subotica), and in Sremska Mitrovica (Društvo Rusnacoh u Srimскеј Mitrovici / Society of the Ruthenians in Sremska Mitrovica). Ruthenian professional institutions are located in Ruski Krstur: Nacionalni Sovit Ruskeј Nacionalneј Menšini / National Council of Rusyn National Minority, Zavod za Kulturu Vojvodanskih Rusnacoh / Institute for Culture of the Vojvodinian Ruthenian, Ruski Narodni Teater Petro Riznič Đađa / Ruthenian National Theatre Petro Riznič Đađa and Dom Kulturi / Home of Culture.

There are around twenty five traditional cultural festivals / manifestations: Festival of Ruthenian Culture Red Rose, Festival of Theatrical Performances for Children and Adults the Drama Memorial Petro Riznič Đađa, Cultural Manifestation Kosteljnik's Autumn, Multimedial Manifestation Dnjovka, Festival Vodova Fest, International Voluntary Work Camp (in Ruski Krstur), Festival of Authentic Creativity of the Ruthenians Kucura Harvest, Fine Arts and Literary Colony Erato above Kucura, International Festival of Humour and Satire Kucura Corncob, Struggle against Primitivism in Music Karaoki Stop Beautiful Singing Forward, Fine Arts Colony from Our Past to Our Future, Christmas Concert, Easter in Kucura, Children's Drama Meetings (in Kucura), Festival of New Ruthenian Songs in Folk Spirit Rose Garden, Festival of Monodrama and Duodrama, Days of Mikola M. Kočiš, Professor Havrijil H. Nađ Memorial, Festival of Children's Creativity Veselinka, Poetic Threads of Melanija Pavlović, Meeting of the Ruthenian Primary and Secondary Schools (in Novi Sad), Festival of Authentic Singing Not to Forget (in Đurđevo), Festival of Folk Orchestras Melodies of the Ruthenian Court (in Šid), Cultural Manifestation Spring of Dr. Mafej Vinaj, Concert of Serious Music (in Subotica), Literary-Theatrical Encounter Anniversary of Birth of Fable Author Štefan Čakan, Manifestation the 13th of May (in Novo Orahovo), Meeting of Choirs, Art Colony Njaradi (in Vrbas), Fine Arts Colony Meeting at Bodnarov's (in Gospođinci), Meeting of Elocutionists (in Kula), and others.

The effective safeguarding of the collective identity of the Vojvodinian Ruthenians relies on the full implementation of the novel legal provisions and on the attitude of the Ruthenian minority itself towards the question of preserving the community identity.

According to the 2002 census, there are 15,905 Ruthenians in Serbia. Ruthenians make up 0.2 per cent of the population of Serbia and 0.9 per cent of the population of Vojvodina.



## *5. Factors of preservation in the 21st century*

In the last few years the Republic of Serbia has even taken several steps that undoubtedly reveal a great deal of effort to improve Ruthenian minority status. Eight years ago, Provincial Secretariat for Administration, Regulations and National Minorities established a completely new institution – National Council for each minority. National councils, as the highest organs of minority self-management in the Republic of Serbia, were established on the basis of the Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities in 2002 in former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia which was verified by the Assembly, and with organizational and other support of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights (Руснаци, 2009, p. 17). In the same year, among the first national communities, the Ruthenian national community founded its own Council on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2002. The mandate of the first *National Council of the Rusyn National Minority* lasted to the 30<sup>th</sup> of October 2004, when, after the early Electoral Assembly, the new one was elected, whose mandate ended in the middle of 2010.

The main fields of activities of the National Council of the Rusyn National Minority are culture, education, media and, generally speaking, almost everything that is important to the Ruthenian minority. The Council is the only legal representative of the Ruthenian minority. All Ruthenian institutions and organizations apply with their projects to different Provincial Secretariats (for national minorities, for education, for science and technological development, for culture, for religion, for economy and others) and NCRNM approves or denies their financing by provincial authorities. The National Council of the Rusyn National Minority also receives periodical funds both from the Ministries of the Republic of Serbia from Belgrade and the Provincial / Vojvodinian Secretariats for sponsoring, to some reasonable extent, the whole cultural activity.

The Law on the National Councils was passed in 2006. Generally speaking, the National Council of Rusyn National Minority have been given a possibility, but also the obligation to coordinate and take care of the implementation of minority rights in the fields of education, culture, information and in the field of official use of language and script.

Since the National Council of Rusyn National Minority represents the most legitimate self-management body of the Ruthenian minority in the Republic of Serbia, it can be said that the Ruthenians, for the first time in their history, have received the opportunity to create a great deal of their own fate with the funds provided by the state (Руснаци, 2009, p. 18).

In accordance with the Law the immediate elections were held for the first time on the 6th of June 2010. The establishment of the NCRNM is a radical innovation. It has its precedent in Hungary legislation.

The next factor of existence is the establishment of the *Institute for Culture of the Vojvodinian Ruthenians*. The Institute was founded as a public institution on the basis of mutual Decision of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina Assembly and the National Council of the Rusyn National Minority, on the basis of the Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the Law of Public Services and the Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities. Necessary financial resources for work and programme activity of the Institute are supplied from the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina budget, the income made by own activities, as well as from the means donated by domestic and foreign funds.

The main goal of the Institute is giving assistance in attaining and affirmation of excellence of culture of Vojvodinian Ruthenians in the broadest sense. Its programme is realized through the documentation-informative programme, development-research programme and programme for international cooperation and cooperation with associations of citizens, nongovernment organizations, local self-managements and other institutions. The Institute intends to raise cultural level of authors and audience and to connect Ruthenian cultural system with local, regional, provincial, national and European cultural systems (Руснаци, 2009, p. 32).

Since the Institute was founded only a couple of years ago (2008), its first steps were addressed to making strategies for almost all cultural fields. The Ruthenian national community expects that in the near future the Institute for Culture of the Vojvodinian Ruthenians and the National Council of Rusyn National Minority join their forces and realize some of great Ruthenian projects, such as the National Museum, the National Gallery and the National Archive. The Institute for Culture has already conceived several concrete projects towards systematizing and preserving the cultural heritage.

Another factor is the establishment of the *Apostolic Exarchate for Greek Catholics in Serbia and Montenegro*.

The Ruthenians established parishes soon after their settlement in Bačka. They built churches only a few years after their settlement in Krstur and in Kucura. In the beginning the Ruski Krstur and Kucura parishes had been included in the Kaloča Roman Catholic Archbishopric, and, in 1777, they became parts of the Križevci Bishopric for Greek Catholics. Church Greek Catholic tradition helped them to stabilize the values which had literally been unchanged from their settlement until the First World War.

Since the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2003 a separate Apostolic Exarchate for Greek Catholics in Serbia and Montenegro has existed, and the first exarch has been bishop Dr. Heorhij

Džudžar. The Apostolic Exarchate consists of the following parishes: Bačinci, Beograd, Berkasovo, Bikič Do, Vrbas 1, Vrbas 2, Gospođinci, Đurđevo, Indija, Kula, Kucura, Markovac, Novi Sad, Novo Orahovo, Ruski Krstur, Sremska Mitrovica, Subotica, Šid, and the parishes in Bačka Topola and Vršac are being formed (Руснаци, 2009, p. 67) There are around 22,000 believers in the Apostolic Exarchate, and, apart from the Ukrainians and Romanians who are also Greek Catholics, almost all Ruthenians (around 16,000) are Greek Catholics. The pilgrimage place of the Apostolic Exarchate is Vodica.

Unquestionably, the Apostolic Exarchate participates in preserving not only the Greek Catholic values but also in preserving the Ruthenian language and tradition. The Apostolic Exarchate publishes a monthly journal the *Dzvoni / Bells* and several publications yearly.

One of the most important factors is the existence of the *educational vertical* – from preschool education to the Department of the Ruthenian Studies in Novi Sad.

There are a children's nursery, extended stay and educational groups for preparing children for school in Ruski Krstur. Educational groups in which children are prepared for school in the Ruthenian language and extended stay for preschool children exist in Kucura and Đurđevo. In places where there is no possibility of organizing regular educational groups in the Ruthenian language, Ruthenian is taught within a special subject called *Fostering the Ruthenian Language with Elements of National Culture*. Such educational groups have been organized in Kula, Novi Sad and Vrbas, and there is a plan to organize preschool fostering the Ruthenian language within the preschool departments in Bačinci, Berkasovo, Bikič Do and Šid (Руснаци, 2009, pp. 25-26).

According to the Law Ruthenian pupils attending primary schools in those Vojvodinian municipalities and localities where a considerable percentage of Ruthenians live (up to 15 %) are entitled to three classes in their mother tongue a week. All other subjects (or most of them) are also taught in Ruthenian. The Serbian language (three classes a week) and two foreign languages (the first foreign language from the 1st grade, the second foreign language from the 5th grade – two classes a week) are exceptions and they are compulsory.

Apart from the regular teaching (all subjects) in the Ruthenian language from the 1st to the 8th grade in Ruski Krstur, Kucura and Đurđevo (Сакач-Фейса et al., 2008, pp. 312-313), in other Ruthenian places where, because of a small number of pupils, there is no possibility of organizing regular teaching in the Ruthenian language, the Ruthenian language teaching with elements of national culture is organized. The subject is optional and delivered on a two-classes a week basis. It takes place in Bačka Topola, Gospođinci, Kucura, Kula, Novi Sad, Novo Orahovo, Petrovaradin, Savino Selo, Sremska Kamenica, Sremska Mitrovica, Subotica, Veternik, Vrbas, and

in Šid where there are separate departments in Bačinci, Berkasovo and Bikič Do. The total number of places amounts to 16 and more than 330 pupils from 35 schools are included in them (Руснаци, 2009, p. 27). General trend is that the number of pupils in schools with regular teaching is getting lower and the number of pupils in schools with fostering is getting higher.

Primary education in Ruthenian is both compulsory and free of charge. The necessary minimum number of schoolchildren for organizing a class is 15, but with the approval of the Ministry of Education it is possible to organize a class for even less number than 15.

No private schools teaching in the Ruthenian language currently function in Vojvodina at any level.

The Petro Kuzmjak High School (Gymnasium) in Ruski Krstur has provided a complete secondary education in the Ruthenian language since 1970. It is the only high school in Ruthenian in the world (Фейса, 2006, p. 34). There is a boarding accomodation for schoolchildren and because of that it is possible to register schoolchildren from Serbia and from other countries where the Ruthenians / Rusyns live. It is very important to emphasize that even the Rusyns from the Carpatian area feel the high school as its own, especially those from Ukraine who have almost nothing of the educational vertical in Serbia.

With respect to elementary and secondary education the responsible organs are authorized to allow for the arrangement of teaching programmes in Ruthenian (as well as in the languages of other national minorities) when less than 15 pupils / students per class are native speakers. The fact is that the overall number of pupils / students per class taught in the Ruthenian language has slightly been decreasing.

The Department of the Ruthenian Studies presents the highest level of education in Ruthenian. The new curriculum of the Department of the Ruthenian Studies, based on the Bologna Declaration, was accredited last year. Apart from the Ruthenian Phonetics, Morphology, Syntax, Historical Grammar, Ruthenian Literature, Ruthenian History and Ruthenian Folklore Studies, several new courses were introduced: Ruthenian Language Orthography, English-Ruthenian Contrastive Grammar, and Carpatho-Rusyn Language (professor Mihajlo Fejsa's courses), and Ruthenian Children Poetry, Novel and Drama (professor Julijan Tamaš's courses).

Since the Ruthenian population in Vojvodina / Serbia is rather small the Department of the Ruthenian Studies is specific for a relatively small number of students. Approximately twenty five students study at the Department. On the average there are five students enrolled per school year.

The Ruthenian language courses can also be taken at the Media Department where there is a possibility to enroll two budget students. Students from several

departments at the Faculty of Philosophy can study the Ruthenian language as an elective course.

Thirty seven students have graduated from the Department of the Ruthenian Studies so far.

The *Internet* is an extremely important source of information both for the Vojvodinian Ruthenians and for the Carpatho-Rusyns in general.

Within the NPI Ruske slovo there is an agency of daily news called *Ruthen Press*. It broadcasts news every day except on Sunday.

There are several sites dedicated to the Vojvodinian Ruthenians. The e-address of the National Council of Rusyn National Minority is [www.rusini.rs](http://www.rusini.rs), the e-address of the Institute for Culture of the Vojvodinian Ruthenians – [www.zavod.rs](http://www.zavod.rs), and the e-address of the Ruthenian Home – [www.ruskamatka.org](http://www.ruskamatka.org). The private site [www.rusnak.info](http://www.rusnak.info) (created in 2001) by Miroslav Siladji is very important since users can read uncensored information. The presentations on the Internet have been aimed to draw together all of the former and present residents of the Carpathian area and all others interested in the culture of the Carpatho-Rusyns. Being almost uncontrolled, the World Wide Web is very useful to the Carpatho-Rusyns, especially to overcome some of those problems mentioned above.

One of the most important factors is represented by the *revolutionary changes* in Central and Eastern Europe that brought the rebirth of cultural identity for the Carpatho-Rusyns. Mutual awareness and closer contacts between the Vojvodinian Ruthenians and their brethren in the Carpathian homeland – a process initiated in 1989 – can in the future assist all Carpatho-Rusyns in their ongoing struggle to survive as a national community. Today the Ruthenians of the Republic of Serbia / the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina are recognized officially as a distinct national minority with their own literary language. The Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic have acknowledged Rusyns as a distinct minority as well.

The Rusyns / Ruthenians of Serbia are no longer alone. They have many opportunities for joint projects of different kinds. For example, a book containing Rusyn poetry of all Rusyn enclaves *Rusinski / Ruski Pisnji* (1997), edited by Natalija Dudaš; a bilingual English-Rusyn manual *Let's Speak English and Rusyn / Bešedujme po Ruski i po Anglijski* by P. R. Magocsi and M. Fejsa (1998); *Encyclopedia of Rusyn History and Culture*, edited by Paul Robert Magocsi and Ivan Pop, was published in English (Magocsi and Pop, 2002); Paul Robert Magocsi edited *Rusinskij jazik* (Magocsi, 2004). After 1989, the Carpatho-Rusyns have obviously risen like Phoenix out of ashes, and we may conclude that the Rusyn question has not been resolved in the Stalin way.

Two decades after the Velvet Revolution it is clear that the Carpatho-Rusyns were never completely wiped out from their homeland. Today, the governments of Slovakia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, and Croatia recognize the Carpatho-Rusyns as a national minority. In Hungary there are today 32 communities in which Rusyns have their own minority self-government. In Romania the Rusyns have their own deputy representing specifically Rusyn cultural and civic interests in the National Parliament in Bucharest (Magocsi, 2006, 109). All the mentioned countries have recorded Rusyns in their most recent census reports: in Slovakia – 55,000; in Serbia – 16,000; in United States – 12,500; Croatia – 2,300; Poland – 5,900; Hungary – 1,100; Czech Republic – 1,100; Romania – 200. As historically been the case with stateless minority peoples, Rusyns are often reluctant to identify themselves as such or have simply not been recorded by governments in the countries they live (for ex. in Canada and in Australia) (Magocsi, 2006, p. 11). Only the government of Ukraine refuses to recognize the Carpatho-Rusyns as a national minority. According to official data there are 10,000 Rusyns, regardless of the effects of Stalin's policy that have been the strongest in Ukraine, where the Carpatho-Rusyns have officially been considered to be a subethnos of the Ukrainian nation. Only this summer has the government of Ukraine recognized Rusyns.

So called *international factor* is also very important. We have already mentioned that our country ratified the most important international documents that ensure the existence of the Ruthenian minority.

## **6. Concluding remarks**

According to the first periodical Report of the Committee of Experts on the Implementation of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (accepted on the 12th of September 2008) (to which the Republic of Serbia is obliged by accepting the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 2001) the Ruthenian language has been given special protection under Part III of the Charter (together with Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Croatian, Hungarian, Romani, Romanian, Slovak and Ukrainian).

In the part Overview of the Situation of Regional and Minority Languages, paragraph V, the Report says: „The level of protection of Ruthenian is high, which is reflected by its official status in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, in municipalities and courts. In education, Ruthenian benefits from good teaching materials, a growing number of pupils and the only Ruthenian school worldwide. Deficits exist regarding the availability of television and radio programmes in Ruthenian in all areas where Ruthenian is used” (see the website of the Ministry for Human and Minorities Rights – [www.humanrights.gov.rs](http://www.humanrights.gov.rs)).

In the New Europe without borders the Rusyns / Ruthenians expect to be one of the distinct peoples numbering possibly up to several hundreds of thousands of members. The contacts between the Carpatho-Rusyns will certainly have positive effects on raising awareness of national identity. The contacts will also be very usefull on intellectual, cultural, linguistic and emotional relations.

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