

# VIII World Congress of Rusyns

## Remarks by Professor Paul Robert Magocsi

### The Future of Carpatho-Rusyns? Schools and Young People

June 24, 2005

In contrast to presentations at previous world congresses, my remarks today will be shorter and will only report on the activity of the Carpatho-Rusyn community in North America.

During the past two years, the oldest and largest Rusyn-American institutions achieved important milestones: the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center based in Ocala, Florida celebrated its 25th anniversary; and the Carpatho-Rusyn Society based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania celebrated its 10th anniversary.

In connection with its anniversary, the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center published a booklet that related its history and included greetings from over 40 secular and religious leaders of Rusyn and non-Rusyn background worldwide. During its quarter-century of existence, the Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center has fulfilled its primary goal: to promote knowledge about Carpatho-Rusyns through the distribution of high-quality publications to individuals and institutions in North America and Europe. The center has sold 48,459 books and maps during this period, and it has distributed gratis an even larger number of publications. For instance, in 2004 the center published a third revised edition of its popular brochure on Carpatho-Rusyns. That brochure exists in three variants of the Rusyn language as well as in English, German, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian, Slovak, and Ukrainian. To date, at least 52,000 copies of the brochure in these various languages have been distributed to the public, making it the largest triage of any Rusyn publication to appear in the past several decades.

The Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center has also helped in publishing the second revised and expanded edition of the Encyclopedia of Rusyn History and Culture. This is the first and only encyclopedia that deals with Carpatho-Rusyns in all countries where they live. The first edition, published in 2002, sold out within one year; the second, fully revised edition, with 50 new entries, appeared in early 2005.

The second of our anniversary organizations is the Carpatho-Rusyn Society. This is a grass-roots organization whose purpose is to promote Rusyn culture and identity through member participation in lectures, conferences, exhibits, and folk festivals held across the United States, through annual tours to the European homeland, and through publication of the bi-monthly magazine, *The New Rusyn Times*. The Carpatho-Rusyn Society has nearly 1,800 members. Aside from its national center in Pittsburgh, the society has nine branches spread throughout the United States from New England to Tucson, Arizona. The Washington, D.C. branch of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society has a special role in the national organization, since it functions as a political lobbying group. Earlier this year its representatives met with Senator John McCain, one of the most influential politicians in the United States, urging him to take up with President Viktor Yushchenko the cause for official recognition of Carpatho-Rusyns as a distinct nationality in Ukraine. Among the most important achievements of the Carpatho-Rusyn Society was its acquisition in 2004 of a monumental building, the former Greek Catholic Cathedral Church in Munhall, Pennsylvania, which is now being transformed into the National Carpatho-Rusyn Cultural Center.

There are other Rusyn organizations in North America, whose representatives are members of our World Congress delegation. These include the Rusin Association of Minnesota, the Rusyn Association of North America based in Kitchener, Ontario, and two new organizations formed since 2002: the World Academy of Rusyn Culture based in Toronto, Canada and the Carpathian Institute International based in Connecticut, United States.

Aside from activity in the United States and Canada, each of the North American organizations together with a few individuals have continued to provide assistance to their Carpatho-Rusyn brethren in Europe. In the last two years alone, funds from various North American sources have been given to support the program in Lemko language and culture at the Pedagogical Academy

in Cracow, a web-site for the Rusyn youth organization in Slovakia, and the newspaper, Narodny Novynky. Also in the last two years the Chepa Fellowship in Rusyn Studies at the University of Toronto has been awarded to individuals from Slovakia, Serbia, and Ukraine.

Then there is the very special situation regarding medical supplies sent from the United States to the Regional Hospital in Uzhhorod. These donations are largely the result of the efforts of Michael Kundrat, a Rusyn-American patriot and humanitarian from Binghamton, New York. To date, twelve shipments of medical supplies worth four million dollars have been delivered to Uzhhorod's main hospital. As strange as it may seem, Mr. Kundrat has never been publicly acknowledged in Transcarpathia for his remarkable humanitarian efforts, and no one knows that the supplies are being sent to Uzhhorod—and not elsewhere in Ukraine—precisely because the hospital in question is located in historic Carpathian Rus' and serves in large part the local Rusyn population.

North America's Rusyn communities are especially interested in schools and education. In 2003, Vasylii Sarkanych, head of the Svaljava branch of the Organization of Subcarpathian Rusyns, proposed the creation of Rusyn "Sunday schools," that is, classes in Rusyn language and culture. In the first year of the program (2003-2004) there were 9 classes; this past year (2004-2005) there were 16 classes with nearly 400 students participating. All classes are supported by funds from North America, specifically from the Carpatho-Rusyn Society in the United States and from two individuals in Canada, Steven Chepa and Stepan Moldovan. Mr. Chepa has also paid for the publication of three Rusyn-language textbooks used in Subcarpathia's school program, and in early 2005 he arranged to send Rusyn-language publications to all teachers of Rusyn classes not only in Ukraine but also in Poland and Slovakia. It is also thanks to Mr. Chepa that we have present here in Krynica as guests at the VIII World Congress the best students from each of the 16 classes in the Rusyn School Program in Subcarpathian Rus'.

The case of the other individual donor, Stepan Moldovan, is especially interesting. Mr. Moldovan is a native of Svaljava who, as a young Jewish boy, was protected by local Rusyns from deportation to Ausch-

witz in 1944. He eventually made his way to Canada and, in remembrance for those who saved his life he has decided to donate funds to support the Rusyn School Program in Subcarpathian Rus'.

I should mention that the success of the Rusyn School Program in Subcarpathian Rus' is in large measure due to the dedication of Vasylii Sarkanych. His organizational talent and careful accounting of all funds sent for Rusyn classes is a model worthy of imitation by other Rusyn organizations in Europe. Consequently, we in

North America will do our best to continue financial support for the current number of classes and, hopefully, be able to provide

**... we in North America believe that Rusyn young people and, in particular, education in Rusyn language and culture are the most important factors to assure the future of Carpatho-Rusyns ....**

even more for possible new classes. In short, we in North America believe that Rusyn young people and, in particular, education in Rusyn language and culture are the most important factors to assure the future of Carpatho-Rusyns wherever they may live.

In conclusion, may I interject a personal note. This will be the last World Congress which I will attend as head of the North American delegation. It has been a privilege for me to be part of the World Congress ever since its establishment back in 1991. I especially remember the success of the World Congress under the leadership of its long-term chairman, Vasyl' Turok, and his close associate and immediate successor, Aleksander Zozuliak. My best wishes to those of you, especially of the younger generation, who will carry on the best traditions of the past while at the same time undertaking new initiatives as part of the future work of the World Congress of Rusyns.

Note: The day after he gave this speech, Paul Robert (Bob) Magosci was elected as Chair of the World Congress of Rusyns.