

Oleksandr Pahiria. Karpats'ka Ukraina v dokumentakh Druhoi Chekho-Slovats'koi respubliky [Carpatho-Ukraine in the Documents of the Second Czechoslovak Republic]

Iaroslav Kovalchuk

Volume 9, Number 1, 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1088686ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus721>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies University of Alberta

ISSN

2292-7956 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Kovalchuk, I. (2022). Review of [Oleksandr Pahiria. Karpats'ka Ukraina v dokumentakh Druhoi Chekho-Slovats'koi respubliky [Carpatho-Ukraine in the Documents of the Second Czechoslovak Republic]]. *East/West*, 9(1), 271–274. <https://doi.org/10.21226/ewjus721>



Oleksandr Pahiria. *Karpats'ka Ukraina v dokumentakh Druhoi Chekho-Slovats'koi respubliky* [*Carpatho-Ukraine in the Documents of the Second Czechoslovak Republic*]. Documents translated from the Czech by Iryna Zabiak, maps by Dmytro Vortman, *Ukraina Moderna / Vydavnytstvo Ukrain's'koho Katolyts'koho Universytetu*, 2020. 2 vols. Ukraine. Europe: 1921–1939; Carpatho-Ukraine 1938–1939, Olia Hnatiuk, scholarly editor, Myroslav Chekh, series coordinator. 356 pp. (vol. 1), 864 pp. (vol. 2). Maps. Biographies. Bibliography. Indexes. \$69.50 (two-volume set), cloth.

Teleology represents one of the most widespread and fundamental challenges in history writing. Historians generally see the result of a certain event and then build their narrative showing how everything led to a specific outcome. The history of Carpatho-Ukraine, an autonomous entity in the Second Czechoslovak Republic and a one-day independent republic, is often described as a short-lived attempt at a Ukrainian state on the territory of what is now Transcarpathia oblast in Ukraine. Oleksandr Pahiria's study of Carpatho-Ukraine, which is based on an examination of Czechoslovak documents, theorizes that the proclamation of independent Carpatho-Ukraine was not the direct result of a rising Ukrainian national movement. On the contrary, according to Pahiria, the Ukrainian nationalist leaders of Carpatho-Ukraine, such as Avhustyn Voloshyn and Iulian Revai, were good Czechoslovak citizens who declared an independent republic only after the Nazis had occupied the Czech lands, and Slovakia had announced its independence (1: 182–83).

Karpats'ka Ukraina v dokumentakh Druhoi Chekho-Slovats'koi respubliky is a two-volume publication. Volume 1 has an extended essay describing the political and military dimensions of events in Subcarpathian Rus'/Carpatho-Ukraine in 1938–39 (1: 13–206). There are also short biographies of the prominent personalities involved (see 1: 207–76). Volume 2 is a collection of official Czechoslovak documents, which are divided into two main groups. Section 1 contains a variety of papers produced by official institutions of the First Czechoslovak and Second Czechoslovak Republics (2: 41–546); section 2 provides the testimonies of Czechoslovak border policemen, gendarmes, and soldiers (2: 547–862). These documents present a Czechoslovak angle on political developments in Carpatho-Ukraine—which is absent in Ukrainian historiography—with sources ranging from the government in Prague to Czechoslovak rank-and-file soldiers. Pahiria's aim is to incorporate these sources into his study and juxtapose their perspective with the Ukrainian view of Carpatho-Ukraine.

The territory of Carpatho-Ukraine ended up under Czechoslovakia after the collapse of Austria-Hungary—as one of Czechoslovakia's autonomous units, called Subcarpathian Rus'. However, the Prague government did not provide it with any real autonomy owing to its fear of foreign influences and

its prejudice against the locals. The main Subcarpathian parties, besides experiencing ideological divisions between the left and the right, were divided into Russophiles, who considered the local Slavic population to be part of the Russian cultural and national space, and Ukrainophiles, who advocated affiliation with the Ukrainian culture and nation. Pahiria begins his narrative in the spring of 1938, when these two camps put forward a joint demand for autonomy to Prague. This alliance, however, quickly collapsed after the formation of the first coalition government of Subcarpathian Rus' following the Munich Agreement. Many Russophiles, notably the first prime minister of Subcarpathian Rus', Andrii (Andrei) Brodii, were agents of Hungary or Poland—neighbouring states that were interested in destabilizing and dividing Czechoslovakia. Pahiria, opposing a widespread view of Ukrainophiles as agents of Nazi Germany, claims that Brodii's successor, the Ukrainophile Voloshyn, supported Prague, while the Russophiles assisted foreign terrorist operations (1: 123). Consequently, pro-Czechoslovak Russophiles were marginalized (Edmund Bachyns'kyi [Bačinský], for instance) or turned to hostile foreign powers (as happened with Ivan P"ieshchak).

However, relations between Prague and Khust, the capital of Carpatho-Ukraine after the First Vienna Award, gradually deteriorated. Pahiria does not see the source of this conflict as the Carpatho-Ukrainian leaders' national aspirations focused on the building of a Greater Ukraine or their orientation toward Nazi Germany. On the contrary, the correspondence between Prague and Khust as well as Czechoslovak official documents on Carpatho-Ukraine demonstrate a friction between a federal centre that wanted to control its regions and an autonomous body that sought to be the main power on the ground. According to Pahiria, what was happening was an institutional conflict of the Second Czechoslovak Republic, that is, a clash between the centre and the periphery. Its main figure was General Lev Prchala, who was appointed minister of internal affairs of Carpatho-Ukraine by Prague. Voloshyn's government aimed to replace all Czech bureaucrats with local Ukrainians and did not intend to tolerate a Czech in control of the police and the army in the region. The contest took place primarily between the Carpathian Sich (Karpats'ka Sich), a paramilitary organization of local Ukrainophiles and Ukrainian nationalist émigrés from Poland, and Prchala (1: 103–05). It culminated in open shootouts between the Sich fighters and the Czechoslovak army, on 14 March 1939. Pahiria explains how the battle stemmed from Sich attempts to disarm Czechoslovak regiments ahead of the Hungarian invasion, in defence of the future independent republic. The escalation occurred after Slovakia had proclaimed independence, and the Nazis were ready to occupy the Czech lands. Pahiria, arguing against other

historians, claims that Voloshyn's government did not facilitate the crisis, but reacted to it (1: 139–69).

The main flaw of Pahiria's text is its lack of engagement with the Czech historiography that relies on the same documents that Pahiria does for his presentation to the Ukrainian audience. Pahiria's main Czech counterpart is historian and archivist David Hubený, who has published several articles on Carpatho-Ukraine. Pahiria does not meaningfully engage with Hubený's arguments and dismisses them as prejudiced against Carpatho-Ukraine because Hubený considers Voloshyn to have been a Nazi collaborator and the Sich members—fascists (1: 15n6). Hubený, in analysing the Czechoslovak documents, finds that Voloshyn's government was interested in contacts with the Nazis (see Hubený, "Čeští úředníci"). Pahiria avoids this point, emphasizing that the Nazi leadership was not interested in Carpatho-Ukraine. Either Pahiria or Hubený is cherry-picking his sources. Both authors avoid a comprehensive discussion of the Sich's ideology and radical—sometimes anti-Czechoslovak—attitudes.

The authoritarianism of Carpatho-Ukraine is another controversial topic that Pahiria does not handle very well. He convincingly positions the authoritarian measures of Voloshyn's government within the general Czechoslovak drift from democracy (1: 21). Yet he argues that the Ukrainophile movement enjoyed popular support based on the elections in Carpatho-Ukraine, which took place with no alternatives and with interference from the Sich fighters (1: 117–18). The elections were used to legitimize the Ukrainophile regime in Carpatho-Ukraine and marginalize its opponents. Hubený is more critical of these elections and their violation of democratic processes (see Hubený, "Podkarpatoruské volby").

In the end, Pahiria's narrative adheres to the basic formula of political history that has dominated the historiography of Carpatho-Ukraine. Beyond the areas of high politics and military operations, Pahiria does not suggest any promising new focuses for the examination of Carpatho-Ukraine that would enrich our current understanding of this short-lived polity. For instance, the cultural and social dimensions are missing. Following this idea, the testimonies of Czechoslovak soldiers could be used as the basis for a social history exploring inter-ethnic relations between the Czechs and the local population of Carpatho-Ukraine. In short, then, turning away from the cursed political questions could invigorate future studies of Carpatho-Ukraine.

Iaroslav Kovalchuk
University of Alberta

Works Cited

- Hubený, David. "Čeští úředníci na Podkarpatské Rusi za druhé republiky z pohledu centrální vlády v Praze" ["Czech Officials in Subcarpathian Rus' during the Second Republic from the Point of View of the Central Government in Prague"]. *Podkarpatská Rus [Subcarpathian Rus']*, special issue of *Paginae historiae: Sborník Národního archivu [Pages of History: Compendium of the National Archive (Prague)]*, Hubený, volume editor, vol. 23, no. 2, 2015, pp. 39–62. *DocPlayer*, <https://docplayer.cz/209530952-Paginae-historiae-sbornik-narodniho-archivu-23-2.html>. Accessed 10 Mar. 2022.
- . "Podkarpatoruské volby do sněmu a přezkum u Volebního soudu v roce 1939" ["The Subcarpathian Ruthenian Parliamentary Elections and Electoral Court Review in 1939"]. *Politická kultura v českých zemích a v Československu 1848–1948 [Political Culture in the Czech Lands and in Czechoslovakia, 1848–1948]*, special issue of *Historie—Otázky—Problémy [History—Issues—Problems (Prague)]*, Jan Randák, editor-in-chief, vol. 6, no. 1, 2014, published Oct. 2015, pp. 181–90, http://digitool.is.cuni.cz/R/65Q9FQLXY7YREQ73FAYEE5R7CXF4URR2299G2PLYMPD3NFNI5T-00044?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=1351556&silolibrary=GEN01&pds_handle=GUEST. Accessed 10 Mar. 2022.