

Ewa Michna

“Between Emancipation and the Struggle for Survival. The Rusyn/Lemko Language in the Third Decade of the 21st Century”

In the book that summarized my ethnographic research on the Carpatho-Rusyn movement in Slovakia, Ukraine, and Poland¹, published 20 years ago, the relationship between language and nation and the processes of national/ethnic emancipation was one of the main axes of analysis. Moreover, for most of those Carpatho-Rusyn activists I interviewed having a separate, codified language was the essential attribute of a nation. They considered Rusyn language a core ethnic marker and knowing it was an important criterion for being part of the group. Hence, Carpatho-Rusyn activists made language codification processes part of their emancipatory agenda. The processes of codification and officialization of the Rusyn language were successful in Poland and Slovakia but not in Ukraine. In my presentation, I would like to take the research carried out at the turn of the century as a starting point for reflecting on the contemporary situation of the Rusyn language and its users from an *emic* perspective in those three countries. I am interested in the changes we have seen during the last twenty years in the narratives of Carpatho-Rusyn activists regarding the linguistic situation of the group. How do social and political factors (legal recognition and inclusion in the minority protection system, and codification and officialization of the language, or lack thereof) affect the current situation of the Rusyn language in particular regions and the emergence of new challenges for activists who wish to preserve and develop the Rusyn language? How do they influence changing linguistic ideologies and views on the relationship between language and nation, language and identity?

In my presentation I will also consider whether the theoretical category of linguistic nationalism, a derivative of methodological nationalism, is the best tool for analyzing the contemporary situation of the language of the East Slavic inhabitants of the Carpathian Mountains or, more broadly, of stateless ethnic minorities in Central and Eastern Europe?

¹ Ewa Michna, 2004, *Kwestie etniczno-narodowościowe na pograniczu Słowiańszczyzny wschodniej i zachodniej. Ruch rusiński na Słowacji. Ukrainie i w Polsce*, Kraków: Polska Akademia Umiejętności. Prace Komisji Wschodnioeuropejskiej, T. VIII.

If not, what other categories might be relevant?

My presentation will draw on my research among Carpatho-Rusyn activists since the early 1990s, material collected during subsequent field revisits, and analysis of secondary materials, mainly ethnic media content in the three regions studied and social media network discussions. I will also draw on the research and analysis of the works of scholars from the group, some of whom combine academic work with language activism.