

## MEMORANDUM

Since its establishment as an independent post-Soviet state in 1991, Ukraine has striven to create a democratic system of governance, a free-market economy, and a foreign policy directed toward integration with the rest of Europe, in particular the European Union. One indication of Ukraine's commitment to democratic values are the policies it has adopted toward the various peoples (national minorities) other than ethnic Ukrainians who comprise its citizenry.

An important aspect of the "nationality question" has been the status of the Ukrainian language. Independent Ukraine's first constitution, adopted in 1996, proclaimed Ukrainian as the state language. This decision did not necessarily sit well with the millions of Ukraine's citizens who continue to use Russian as their primary means of communication. At the same time, supporters of the Ukrainian language felt that, despite its constitutional status, the Ukrainian language did not yet overcome the secondary status (in comparison to Russian) that it has historically had in many spheres of civic and cultural life.

In an effort to address the sometimes conflicting concerns surrounding the country's two main languages, Ukrainian and Russian, the Parliament of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada) adopted on July 3, 2012 a bill, "The Principles of the State's Language Policy," which, on August 8, 2012, was signed into law (No. 5029-VI) by President Viktor Yanukovich. The law addresses ways to protect and enhance the development of the country's second main language, Russian, as well as seventeen "regional" languages used by Ukrainian citizens of various ethnolinguistic backgrounds. Provided in the law is a list of all seventeen recognized regional languages, one of which is Rusyn.

In response to criticism, mostly on the part of persons concerned with the status of the Ukrainian language, President Yanukovich convened a "working group" of advisors to propose

amendments to the recently adopted language law. The “working group” is planning to submit an extensively revised text in the expectation that parliament will pass a new language law in accordance with its recommendations.

Among the working group’s recommendations is the deletion of one language from the list of regional languages. That one deletion is Rusyn. The explanation given by some members of the presidential “working group” is that Rusyn is only a “dialect of Ukrainian.”

We, the undersigned, representing the seven largest organizations of Carpatho-Rusyns in the United States and Canada, and in solidarity with Carpatho-Rusyn organizations in the Transcarpathian oblast of Ukraine, express strong opposition to any efforts that would remove Rusyn from the list of legally approved regional languages in Ukraine. To do so would be a violation of the European Charter of Human Rights to which Ukraine is a signatory.

The Rusyn language and the Rusyn nationality are officially recognized by neighboring countries of the European Union—Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary—as well as by Serbia and Croatia, where Carpatho-Rusyns also live. The Rusyn language has been codified, it is taught in schools, and it is used in civic and cultural affairs in all those countries. Only Ukraine refuses to recognize Carpatho-Rusyns as a distinct nationality and Rusyn as a distinct language.

We, the undersigned, sympathize with the need to enhance through affirmative-action measures the status of the Ukrainian language, if no where else than in the very country—Ukraine—where it is the state language. This should not be done, however, at the expense of languages spoken by those Ukrainians/Ukrainian citizens who are not ethnic Ukrainians. The argument for excluding Rusyn, allegedly because it is a “dialect,” is not only politically motivated but intellectually dishonest. Imagine trying to use nineteenth-century German “scholarly” arguments to tell Luxembourgers today that their officially recognized language should not have such a status because it is a “dialect” of German. Analogously, some

authoritative voices in Bulgaria still argue that Macedonian, the official language of Macedonia, is merely a dialect of Bulgarian. Of all people, Ukrainians—in particular language patriots—should not have to be reminded that in the nineteenth-century autocratic Russian Empire their language was outlawed, based on the explanation of tsarist government officials and scholars that it was merely the “Little Russian dialect” of Russian.

For political, civic, and cultural leaders from powerful countries with a long tradition of independent statehood—the United States, Great Britain, France, among others—it may be difficult to understand why language is so important. However, for Europe’s stateless peoples—Catalans, Welsh, Basques, Carpatho-Rusyns—this is certainly not difficult to understand. They know that their native language, or mother tongue, is at the core and is the very essence of their identity.

We support Ukraine’s efforts for greater integration within Europe, but it should not do this while trampling over basic human rights and denying the language and identity of its Carpatho-Rusyn citizens.

### **Carpatho-Rusyn Consortium of North America**

Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, Inc.  
New York, New York

Rusyn Association of North America  
Kitchener, Ontario

Carpatho-Rusyn Society, Inc.  
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Rusyn-Saskatchewan Ruthenian Association  
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan

Rusin Association  
Minneapolis, Minnesota

World Academy of Rusyn Culture  
Toronto, Ontario

Lemko Association, Inc.  
Higganum, Connecticut

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