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The Rusin Standard Language in Serbia and Croatia and the Rusyn Standard Language in Slovakia

Tens of thousands of Rusins live in Vojvodina (northern Serbia) and a few thousand in nearby Slavonia (western Croatia). Their ancestors came there from what is now Slovakia in the mid-1700s. They have cultivated a standardized version of their language since early in the 20th century, and thanks to relatively liberal minority-language policies, have used it in education, publishing, and media (on the radio and recently on the internet). Hundreds of thousands of Rusyns live in the Carpathian area: in eastern Slovakia, in SW Ukraine, in scattered groups in Poland, and in smaller populations in Hungary. The largest populations live within Ukraine, but there they were always officially considered a type of Ukrainian. In Slovakia from the end of World War II to 1989 they were also officially considered to be Ukrainians and provided with Ukrainian education and media, though far from all Rusyns accepted this as their own. Since 1989 they have been working on standardizing their language, but dialect differences have so far resulted in one standard for Slovakia, another for Poland, and several proposed versions elaborated by individual activists in Ukraine. Some publications in Slovakia include texts in Vojvodina Rusin alongside Slovak Rusyn, a tangible sign of felt unity. The Rusyns/Rusins feel a cultural unity based to a great extent on religious preference: most, if not all of them, adhere to the Greek Catholic (Eastern Rite = Byzantine Catholic) Church, thus being differentiated both from the much more widespread Roman Catholic rite and from the various Eastern Orthodox churches. It is instructive to compare the new Rusyn standard of Slovakia and the somewhat older Rusin standard of Vojvodina. The first has many more explicitly East Slavic features than the second; it also has 7 vowels, and free and mobile word accent, thus making it relatively difficult to learn both for outsiders and for Vojvodina Rusins (with their 5 vowels and predictable penultimate accent).