

Rusyns survive time in Central & Eastern Europe

One of the joys of living in Central Europe is to discover more about its history. On a trip over from Luxembourg, a while back, I came across an interesting article in *Time Magazine* about 'Lost Tribes in Old Europe'. One of these 'lost tribes' is that of the Rusyns who are located in eight countries spread over Central and Eastern Europe. Most live in Eastern Slovakia and Western Ukraine. Rusyns are also known as Ruthenians. They are members of a Slavic tribe that settled in this area in the 6th century. Rusyns speak a distinct language. They are renowned for their exquisite wooden churches, often built without nails. They were mainly a poor farming community yet their culture and tradition were very vibrant and widespread. Rusyns have resisted assimilation for centuries. They have endured hardship. The Hungarians suppressed them by forcing them to learn Hungarian. The Austrians stole their land and taxed them to the hilt by demanding more animals and crops. This severe hardship forced thousands and thousands of Rusyns to emigrate after 1880 to the industrial regions of north-east America.

Following World War II Polish security forces drove thousands of Rusyns from their villages in southern Poland to Soviet Ukraine. Stalin annexed former eastern Slovak land to the USSR thus dividing the Rusyn population further. The Ukrainian government has yet to recognise them as a separate ethnicity. Under Czechoslovakia's communist regime they were declared to be Ukrainian and their Greek Catholic church abolished. Thousands of Rusyns were forced to assimilate into becoming Slovaks. Today though times have changed. Rusyns are recognised as 'an ethnic minority' in EU countries and Serbia. Their language is taught in some Slovak and Hungarian schools. A Rusyn revival has taken place. A new pride and interest in Rusyn cultural roots has occurred. A pride, incidentally, that was suppressed during communism. Rusyn festivals are held. Their former lands do still remain divided. This time by Schengen borders.

One of the most famous sons of Rusyn decent is the 60's American icon Pop artist Andy Warhol. His parents were Rusyns, coming from a very small village called Mikova, which is 14km from Medzilaborce (pop 6,500), an

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Level: Intermediate / Upper intermediate

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impoverished town in north-eastern Slovakia. Thanks to EU grants Medzilaborce has re-branded itself as 'Warhol City'. Bus stops and facades are now branded in the style of Warhol's Pop Art. There is even The Andy Warhol Museum of Modern Art that draws in the tourists. More than 17,000 people visit the place annually, yet ironically Warhol himself never visited it.

Some 1.2 million Rusyns are currently estimated to be living in Central & Eastern Europe. An estimated 1,020,000 Rusyns live in Western Ukraine** though on the census form this figure is reduced to just 10,100. The Ukrainians don't recognise Rusyns. The Slovak census of 2001, recorded 24,000 Rusyns. This represents an increase of 40% since the last census of 1991. Unofficial estimates indicate there are actually 120,000 Rusyns living in Slovakia. Groups like Rusyn Revival were set up in Slovakia after 1989, to revivify their beleaguered community into becoming Rusyns again by publishing newspapers and lobbying the government. Rusyn nationality in Slovakia dropped from 110,000 in 1910 to around 16,800 in 1991.

The 1990 Hungarian census showed 1,000 Rusyns. Unofficially, there are an estimated 3,000 Rusyns living there. There are an estimated 3,000 Rusyns living in Croatia, and an estimated 150,000 living in Poland. Another 12,000 are estimated to be living in the Czech Republic, though on the census form it is officially 2,000. In Romania, the census shows that there are only 350 Rusyns living there. Unofficial estimates put this figure as high as 40,000. In Serbia, the 2002 census registered 15,626 declared ethnic Panonian Rusyns. It is not clear from these figures whether the Rusyn people were forced by the countries they live in to assimilate and take another nationality or people simply switched nationalities on the census form in order to be able to live in these countries. It was *probably* a bit of both.

Rusyns know in order to survive and to avoid their nationality being wiped out their people will need to de-assimilate further i.e. to become 100% Rusyn again, and to breed more. In Hungary, there is the Organisation of Rusyn Youth – set up to promote Rusyn identity among young people. As it is, many Rusyns in Slovakia and Hungary depart their impoverished regions - going to their capital cities of Bratislava and Budapest, or even abroad in search of work leaving only the elderly who are leaving themselves to eternity. Assimilation into the majority population is though still taking place – these days through ethnically-mixed marriages. *It is interesting just how many young Slovaks today have little knowledge of the subtle assimilation of Rusyns that took place in their country. (**see page 8)*

EXERCISES

1. **Ethnic minorities:** What are ethnic minorities? What do you know about ethnic minorities? Go round the room swapping details.

2. **Rusyns:** What three things do you know about the Rusyn people? Are they an ethnic minority?

3. **Geography: The Rusyn lands:** In what part of Europe will you find many Rusyn people living? What is their 'capital'? What countries do their lands lie mostly in? Draw a map on the board then **look at the map links on page 4** to help you learn more.

4. **Dictation:** The teacher will read four to six lines of the article slowly and clearly. Students will write down what they hear. The teacher will repeat the passage slowly again. Self-correct your work from page one - filling in spaces and correcting mistakes. Be honest with yourself on the number of errors. Advise the teacher of your total number of errors. Less than five is very good. Ten is acceptable. Any more is room for improvement! More than twenty - you need to do some work!

5. **Reading:** The students should now read the article aloud, swapping readers every paragraph.

6. **Vocabulary:** Students should now look through the article and underline any vocabulary they do not know. Look in dictionaries. Discuss and help each other out. The teacher will go through and explain any unknown words or phrases.

7. **The article:** Students should look through the article with the teacher.

- a) What is the article about?
- b) What do you think about the article?

8. **Let's think! Ethnic minorities:** Think of five ethnic minorities in your country. Then add five ethnic minorities who do not have their own country. Write them below. Explain to your partner why you chose these.

Should any of these get their own country? Why? Why not? How are these people treated *in your country/in their area*? Are any minorities mistreated?

Five ethnic minorities in your country	Five ethnic races without their own country in the world
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4
5	5

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

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9. **Let's think:** Think of four Rusyn traditions (You may need to use the internet for this). Discuss with your partner.

1	3
2	4

The teacher will choose some pairs to discuss their findings in front of the class.

10. **Let's do 'The Article Quiz':** Have the students quiz each other in pairs. They score a point for each correct answer and half a point each time they have to look at the article for help. See who can get the highest score!

Student A

- 1) In what part of the world will you find Rusyns?
- 2) What did the Austrians do to the Rusyns?
- 3) Following World War 2 what happened in Poland to the Rusyns?
- 4) What did the communists in Czechoslovakia do to the Rusyns?
- 5) What did the severe hardship force thousands of Rusyns to do?

Student B

- 1) How many Rusyns are estimated to live in Central & Eastern Europe?
- 2) What was and when was the lowest official statistical figure of Rusyns living in Slovakia?
- 3) What are Rusyns doing about their survival?
- 4) What do young people in Slovakia have little knowledge of today?
- 5) What are Rusyns also known as?

11. **Let's talk!** *In pairs:* You are in a pub. The conversation gets onto your English lesson today on the Rusyns. Discuss the subject of **the Rusyns**. One of you can be a Rusyn! *5-minutes*.

12. **Presentation:** In pairs, groups or individually: Prepare in class or at home a 2-minute presentation on: **The Rusyns**. Stand at the front of the class to give your presentation. The class can vote on the best presentation. Class – After the presentations go through the strong and weak points on each presentation.

13. **Let's write an e-mail:** Write and send a 200 word e-mail to your teacher about: **The Rusyns** in your country. Your e-mail can be read out in class.

14. **Sentence starters:** Finish these sentence starters. Correct your mistakes. Compare what other people have written.

- a) Rusyns _____
- b) Severe hardship _____
- c) Today Rusyns _____

MAP LINKS <http://www.carpatho-rusyn.org/setmap.htm>
<http://knickerbockervillage.blogspot.com/2010/02/carpo-rusyn-on-maps.html>
<http://carpatho-rusyn.org/map.jpg> <http://www.carpathorusynsociety.org/geography.html>
http://www.rusyn.org/images/pdf/Carp_Rus_19th_Cent.pdf
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Carpatho_Ukraine_March_1939.png
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:First_Czechoslovak_Republic.SVG

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DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS

- 1) Should the EU care about ethnic minorities? Why? / Why not?
- 2) Do you think the Rusyns who live in America have given up on getting their own country back home in Europe?
- 3) In the 1880's if you had no money and nothing to eat where might you have emigrated to?
- 4) Do you think statistics are sometimes a complete waste of time?
- 5) Why do you think Ukraine is still resisting acknowledging the 'ethnic minority' status of the Rusyns in Western Ukraine?
- 6) Should the Rusyns be allowed to claim their own homeland like the Slovaks and Czechs did?
- 7) Do you think it was weak leadership at the end of World War One that deprived the Rusyns of getting their own homeland?
- 8) Do you think the Czechs and Slovaks had stronger leadership that allowed them to be dominant of the Moravians and Rusyns in Czechoslovakia following its formation?
- 9) Would you like to learn Rusyn?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS

- 1) What do you think about what you read?
- 2) What exactly were you taught at school about Rusyns?
- 3) What do you think about the Rusyns plight?
- 4) What do you think will happen in the future for Rusyns?
- 5) Do you think the Rusyns have had a harsh existence?
- 6) Do you know any Rusyns?
- 7) Do you think Rusyns who were assimilated should re-assimilate i.e. convert back to being Rusyn? Why? Why not?
- 8) Should descendants of Rusyns who may now have another nationality be free to convert back to their original nationality?
- 9) Do you support minority races? In what way?

SPEAKING Let's debate! The Rusyns

Allow 10-15 minutes – As a class / small groups / pairs / 1 to 1

Consider the following - After the Great War (World War 1) Czechoslovakia was formed with four areas: Czechs, Moravians, Slovaks and Rusyns. This was because the Austro-Hungarian Empire was split up. It was felt at the time that the Rusyn people were too small a population to have their own country. They numbered **two** million people... (One website however, says Ruthenians numbered **four** million in 1914 (See map link on page 9 to see a map showing the Ruthenian area on it). Thousands and thousands were therefore **forced** to assimilate, their children or grandchildren today with a new nationality or 50/50. Time has moved on...

CONSIDER: Luxembourg's tiny population of approx 500,000 today. Also the Ukrainian government does not recognise the Rusyn nationality. Its figures classify them so that 'they do not exist'. This is a violation of their human rights.

How does the EU/UN today see this issue?

Should the Rusyns get their own country? OR should the Rusyns remain an ethnic minority in each of the countries they are now in?

The teacher can moderate the session

GAP FILL: READING

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

One of the joys of living in Central Europe is to discover more about its _____. On a trip over from Luxembourg, a while back, I came across an interesting article in *Time Magazine* about 'Lost Tribes in Old Europe'. One of these 'lost tribes' is that of the Rusyns who are located in eight countries spread over Central and Eastern Europe. Most live in Eastern Slovakia and Western Ukraine. Rusyns are also known as Ruthenians. They are members of a Slavic tribe that settled in this area in the 6th century. Rusyns speak a _____ language. They are renowned for their _____ wooden churches, often built without _____. They were mainly a poor farming community yet their culture and _____ were very vibrant and widespread. Rusyns have resisted _____ for centuries. They have endured _____. The Hungarians suppressed them by forcing them to learn Hungarian. The Austrians stole their land and taxed them to the hilt by demanding more animals and _____. This severe hardship forced thousands and thousands of Rusyns to emigrate after 1880 to the industrial regions of north-east America.

tradition

assimilation

hardship

crops

exquisite

nails

history

distinct

Following World War II Polish security forces drove thousands of _____ from their villages in southern Poland to Soviet Ukraine. Stalin _____ former eastern Slovak land to the USSR thus dividing the Rusyn population further. The Ukrainian government has yet to recognise them as a separate _____. Under Czechoslovakia's _____ regime they were declared to be Ukrainian and their Greek Catholic church abolished. Thousands of Rusyns were forced to assimilate into becoming Slovaks. Today though times have changed. Rusyns are recognised as 'an ethnic minority' in EU countries and Serbia. Their language is taught in some Slovak and Hungarian _____. A Rusyn _____ has taken place. A new pride and interest in Rusyn cultural roots has occurred. A pride, incidentally, that was suppressed during communism. Rusyn _____ are held. Their former lands do still remain divided. This time by _____ borders.

Rusyns

Communist

schools

ethnicity

revival

Schengen

festivals

annexed

GRAMMAR

Put the words into the gaps in the text.

One of the joys of living in Central Europe is to discover (1)___ about its history. On a trip over (2)___ Luxembourg, a while back, I came across an interesting article in *Time Magazine* about 'Lost Tribes in Old Europe'. One of these 'lost tribes' is that of the Rusyns who are located in eight countries spread over Central and Eastern Europe. (3)___ live in Eastern Slovakia and Western Ukraine. Rusyns are also known as Ruthenians. They are members of a Slavic tribe that settled in this area in the 6th century. Rusyns speak a distinct language. (4)___ are renowned for their exquisite wooden churches, (5)___ built without nails. They were mainly a poor farming community yet (6)___ culture and tradition were very vibrant and widespread. Rusyns have resisted assimilation for centuries. They have endured hardship. The Hungarians suppressed them by forcing them to learn Hungarian. The Austrians stole their land and taxed (7)___ to the hilt by demanding more animals and crops. (8)___ severe hardship forced thousands and thousands of Rusyns to emigrate after 1880 to the industrial regions of north-east America.

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Following World War II Polish security forces drove thousands (1)___ Rusyns from their villages in southern Poland to Soviet Ukraine. Stalin annexed former eastern Slovak land (2)___ the USSR thus dividing (3)___ Rusyn population further. The Ukrainian government has yet to recognise them as a separate ethnicity. Under Czechoslovakia's communist regime they were declared to be Ukrainian (4)___ their Greek Catholic church abolished. Thousands of Rusyns were forced to assimilate into becoming Slovaks. Today though times have changed. Rusyns are recognised (5)___ 'an ethnic minority' (6)___ EU countries and Serbia. Their language is taught in some Slovak and Hungarian schools. A Rusyn revival has taken place. A new pride and interest in Rusyn cultural roots has occurred. (7)___ pride, incidentally, that was suppressed during communism. Rusyn festivals are held. Their former lands do still remain divided. This time (8)___ Schengen borders.

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SPELLING TEST

The teacher will ask the class individually to spell the following words that are in the article. Afterwards, check your answers with your teacher, using the following ratings: **Pass = 12, Good = 15, Very good = 18, Excellent = 20**

1	recognise	11	ethnicity
2	majority	12	exquisite
3	assimilation	13	annually
4	beleaguered	14	indicated
5	revivify	15	impoverished
6	apocalypse	16	ethnically
7	census	17	emigrate
8	eternity	18	community
9	widespread	19	hardship
10	revival	20	suppressed

LINKS <http://rdsa.tripod.com/organiz.html> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rusyns>
<http://www.slovakia.org/society-rusyn.htm> <http://www.rusyn.org/>
<http://www.rusyn.org/rusyns-language.html> <http://www.lemko.org/>
<http://www.hungarian-history.hu/lib/rusyns/rusyns.pdf>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lemko_Republic
http://www.rusyn.org/images/pdf/Carp_Rus_19th_Cent.pdf
****** http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/core.nsf/a/hmd_info13 - ****see speaking debate on page 5**
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic-art/44386/121069/Map-showing-the-extent-of-Austria-Hungary-1914> <http://web.ku.edu/~eceurope/hist557/lect12.htm>
<http://lazarus.elte.hu/hun/maps/1910/nepek.gif>
The Time Magazine article can be found at:
<http://www.midias-press.org/NR/rdonlyres/8894ACFA-C2E7-4589-9C15-9F5F66B22ACF/0/TimeMagazine290805.pdf>

ANSWERS

GAP FILL: Rusyns survive time in Central & Eastern Europe: One of the joys of living in Central Europe is to discover more about its history. On a trip over from Luxembourg, a while back, I came across an interesting article in *Time Magazine* about 'Lost Tribes in Old Europe'. One of these 'lost tribes' is that of the Rusyns who are located in eight countries spread over Central and Eastern Europe. Most live in Eastern Slovakia and Western Ukraine. Rusyns are also known as Ruthenians. They are members of a Slavic tribe that settled in this area in the 6th century. Rusyns speak a **distinct** language. They are renowned for their **exquisite** wooden churches, often built without **nails**. They were mainly a poor farming community yet their culture and **tradition** were very vibrant and widespread. Rusyns have resisted **assimilation** for centuries. They have endured **hardship**. The Hungarians suppressed them by forcing them to learn Hungarian. The Austrians stole their land and taxed them to the hilt by demanding more animals and **crops**. This severe hardship forced thousands and thousands of Rusyns to emigrate after 1880 to the industrial regions of north-east America. Following World War II Polish security forces drove thousands of **Rusyns** from their villages in southern Poland to Soviet Ukraine. Stalin **annexed** former eastern Slovak land to the USSR thus dividing the Rusyn population further. The Ukrainian government has yet to recognise them as a separate **ethnicity**. Under Czechoslovakia's **communist** regime they were declared to be Ukrainian and their Greek Catholic church abolished. Thousands of Rusyns were forced to assimilate into becoming Slovaks. Today though times have changed. Rusyns are recognised as 'an ethnic minority' in EU countries and Serbia. Their language is taught in some Slovak and Hungarian **schools**. A Rusyn **revival** has taken place. A new pride and interest in Rusyn cultural roots has occurred. A pride, incidentally, that was suppressed during communism. Rusyn **festivals** are held. Their former lands do still remain divided. This time by **Schengen** borders. (V3)

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