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Igor Vehesh

PhD in Political Science, Associate Professor
Uzhgorod National University
3, Narodna Square, Uzhhorod, 88000, Ukraine
E-mail: ihor.vegesh@uzhnu.edu.ua
ORSID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2692-1345>

Mykola Vehesh

Doctor of History, Professor
Head of the Department of Political Science
and Public Administration
Uzhhorod National University
3, Narodna Square, Uzhhorod, 88000, Ukraine
E-mail: mykola.vegesh@uzhnu.edu.ua
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1848-8839>

SUBVERSIVE ACTIVITIES OF HUNGARIAN AND POLISH SABOTAGE GROUPS IN CARPATHIAN UKRAINE (1938–1939)

The article, based on archival and published documents, attempts to highlight the international situation of the Czechoslovak Republic and Transcarpathia on the eve of World War II. It proves that Hungary, throughout the interwar period, pursued an aggressive irredentist policy aimed at destabilizing Czechoslovakia and returning “its original territories”. This revanchist activity culminated in 1938–1939, when the Hungarian government sent diversion groups to Carpathian Ukraine, trying to destabilize the domestic political situation in the region. A similar subversive operation was carried out by Poland, which sought to establish a common Hungarian-Polish border by completely eliminating Czechoslovakia. The authors argue that a “hybrid war” was waged against young Carpathian Ukraine and in mid-March 1939 it escalated into open intervention and occupation of the entire territory of the region.

A. Voloshyn’s government together with the Czechoslovak troops made a lot of efforts to protect the settlements of Carpathian Ukraine from the destructive actions of enemy saboteurs. The formed divisions of the Carpathian Sich and the Ukrainian gendarmerie were involved in the defense of the borders.

Some parallels can be drawn with the events of 2014 in Ukraine, when Russian troops annexed Crimea and occupied part of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In 1938–1939, the governments of Hungary and Poland assured the world community that their troops did not exist in Transcarpathia. Similar is the position of the leadership of the Russian Federation concerning the events of 2014–2021 in Ukraine.

Keywords: *Carpathian Ukraine, Transcarpathia, Czechoslovakia, “hybrid war”, Hungarian and Polish saboteurs, terrorists, autonomous government of A. Voloshyn, Carpathian Sich.*

Ігор Вегеш

канд. політ. наук, доц.

ДВНЗ «Ужгородський національний університет»

88000, Україна, Ужгород, пл. Народна, 3

E-mail: ihor.vegesh@uzhnu.edu.ua

ORSID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2692-1345>

Микола Вегеш

д-р. іст. наук, проф., зав. каф.

політології і державного управління

ДВНЗ «Ужгородський національний університет»

88000, Україна, Ужгород, пл. Народна, 3

E-mail: mykola.vegesh@uzhnu.edu.ua

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1848-8839>

ПІДРИВНА ДІЯЛЬНІСТЬ УГОРСЬКИХ І ПОЛЬСЬКИХ ДИВЕРСІЙНИХ ГРУП У КАРПАТСЬКІЙ УКРАЇНІ (1938–1939)

У статті на основі архівних і опублікованих документів здійснюється спроба висвітлити міжнародне становище Чехословацької республіки й Закарпаття напередодні Другої світової війни. Доводиться, що упродовж усього міжвоєнного періоду Угорщина проводила агресивну іредентистську політику, спрямовану на дестабілізацію Чехословаччини, на повернення «своїх споконвічних територій». Своєї кульмінації ця реваншистська діяльність досягла в 1938–1939 роках, коли угорський уряд направляв у Карпатську Україну диверсійні групи, які намагалися дестабілізувати внутрішньополітичну ситуацію у краї. Аналогічну диверсійну роботу проводила Польща, яка прагнула встановити спільний угорсько-польський кордон за рахунок повної ліквідації Чехословаччини.

Автори доводять, що проти молодій Карпатській Україні велася «гібридна війна», яка в середині березня 1939 р. переросла у відкриту інтервенцію та окупацію всієї території краю.

Ключові слова: *Карпатська Україна, Закарпаття, Чехословаччина, «гібридна війна», угорські та польські диверсанти, терористи, автономний уряд А. Волошина, Карпатська Січ.*

After the end of the First World War, the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, which contemporaries rightly considered a “patchwork” country, disintegrated into a number of independent states. The Czechoslovak Republic became a full-fledged international entity, which included Transcarpathia in accordance with the decisions of the Paris Peace Conference. According to the “General Statute”, the Czechoslovak government was obliged to grant Subcarpathian Rus’ the broadest autonomous rights. The Prague government constantly delayed the fulfillment of its promises, arguing that the Transcarpathians were not yet “ripe” for independent living. The first stage of autonomy was realized only on October 8, 1938. It was a victory of all political forces of the region, both Russophile and Ukrainian movements, which throughout the interwar period actively fought for autonomous rights. If the first autonomous government of A. Brodi tried to pursue a pro-Hungarian policy, then after the arrest of the Prime Minister on October 26, the new cabinet was headed by A. Voloshyn — a bright leader of the Ukrainian movement in the region. Unlike his predecessor, A. Voloshyn set a course for the Ukrainianization of the entire socio-political life of the region, but within the framework of federal Czechoslovakia.

However, we cannot fail to point out that the short-lived existence of an autonomous and later of an independent Transcarpathia (Subcarpathian Rus’, Carpathian Ukraine) coincided with the acute political crisis in Central Europe that took place on the eve of World War II. The Munich Conference on September 29–30 and the Vienna Arbitration on November 2, 1938, signaled the beginning of the state disintegration of the Czechoslovak Republic. Naturally, the international factor has left its mark on the socio-political processes that took place in Europe in general, and in Czechoslovakia and Transcarpathia as an integral part of it, in particular. Czechoslovakia’s attitude to Transcarpathia and the Ukrainian problem in general differed significantly from the policy on the Ukrainian idea of other European countries, especially Poland and Hungary. This fact undoubtedly contributed to A. Voloshyn’s clear Ukrainian course, albeit with a focus on German patronage, and the autonomous government received full support from Ukrainians in Eastern Galicia, European countries, the United States, and Canada, who saw the young state as the germ of a future united Ukraine. Clarifying this problem is of undeniable

scientific and cognitive meaning. A small branch of the Ukrainian people, having received material and moral support from Ukrainian emigration, astonishing the whole world, was able to pursue to some extent its own domestic and foreign policy, which resulted in an attempt to form the Ukrainian statehood. Ukrainians who were under the totalitarian regime in the USSR, who were part of Poland and Romania, did not have such an opportunity.

Throughout the interwar period, Czechoslovakia's neighbor Hungary viewed Transcarpathia as the original Hungarian lands that were temporarily part of another state entity. Hungarian irredentism (from the Italian *irredenta* — unliberated land. It is a movement for the accession of territories with an overwhelming majority of the Hungarian population that were not part of Hungary — *Aut.*) in its territorial claims also included territories inhabited by Ukrainians in Subcarpathian Rus', Eastern Slovakia and Vojvodina, as the former parts of the lands of "St. Stephen's Crown". Transcarpathia was flooded by Hungarian agents who collected signatures for the region's accession to Hungary, distributed anti-Ukrainian leaflets, and spread fake news about the activities of certain politicians in the region. The Hungarian radio propaganda, which acted in unison with the Polish one, was systematic and purposeful. The Czechoslovak and Ukrainian governments made every effort to resist hostile propaganda, but they could not ignore it. The activities of the pro-Hungarian "fifth column" forced the government of A. Voloshyn to restrict to some extent the democratic rights of citizens, which resulted in the closure of some publishing bodies and societies, the opening of a concentration camp to isolate detained Hungarian and Polish agents, temporary closure of borders with Hungary and Poland during the elections on February 12, 1939. The international position of the Czechoslovak Republic and Transcarpathia as its component part deteriorated significantly in the late 1930s, when attacks of Hungarian and Polish sabotage groups on the border settlements became more frequent, effectively launching a "hybrid war" and destabilizing the country's internal situation.

Among the researchers of the history of Carpathian Ukraine, a special place is occupied by the scientific heritage of the famous American historian, a native of Transcarpathia, P. Sterch, who was one of the first to research the subversive activities of Hungarian military formations¹. His article on governmental coordination of Hungarian and Polish terrorist operations in Carpathian Ukraine deserves special attention². The researcher cited significant factual material, including materials from the world periodicals of that time, but he was unable to use the sources contained in the archives of Uzhgorod and Beregovo. The problem of our research was reflected in fragments on the pages of the diary and memoirs of the editor-in-chief of the newspaper "Nova

Svoboda” V. Grendzha-Donsky³. In the works of the Soviet historians published during the 1950s and 1980s, Carpathian Ukraine was described only negatively, and the national liberation movement was treated as an anti-people activity of Transcarpathian nationalists. The only exception was the monograph by B. Spivak, who drew attention to the destabilization of the internal situation in Transcarpathia as the result of attacks of the Hungarian and Polish terrorists and the activities of a pro-fascist agents⁴. If the works of Soviet historians were characterized by silence, and often by direct falsification of Carpathian Ukraine, then, beginning in 1990, the first objective scientific studies appeared. The authors of these studies, analyzing archival documents that were closed for them during the decades of the one-party system, tried to shed light on the international situation on the eve of World War II, including the subversive activities of the Hungarian and Polish saboteurs in Carpathian Ukraine⁵. M. Vehesh, V. Hyrya and I. Korol published a monograph on the Hungarian irredent in Transcarpathia between the two world wars, in which the documents, stored in the State Archive of the Transcarpathian region, were put into scientific circulation for the first time⁶. The collective publications of Ukrainian and Hungarian researchers published over the last decade deserve special attention. They used documents from both Ukrainian and Hungarian archives⁷. Modern Ukrainian historian O. Pahiryia studied the struggle of the People’s Defense Organization “Carpathian Sich” against the hostile activities of Hungarian and Polish terrorists in 1938–1939⁸. He, having introduced into scientific circulation the materials of the Czech and Slovak archives, focused on the coordination of the actions of the Czechoslovak troops and detachments of the Carpathian Sich against the Hungarian sabotage groups⁹. When describing events in Carpathian Ukraine, modern researchers more often use the term “hybrid war”, which was introduced into scientific circulation by Frank Hoffman¹⁰. E. Mahda in his monograph even singled out a separate section “Hybrid wars through the centuries”, in which he traced various hybrid conflicts from ancient times to the present day¹¹. Unfortunately, scientist did not pay attention to the hybrid nature of the subversive activities of Hungarian and Polish saboteurs in Carpathian Ukraine. More about the hybridity of the Czechoslovak-Polish conflict is discussed in the fundamental monograph of the Polish historian D. Dabrowski¹² and in some publications of the Ukrainian researchers¹³. The attempt of the Polish military leadership to hide its participation in the destabilization of the internal situation of Carpathian Ukraine is being investigated by the already mentioned O. Pahiryia¹⁴.

The subject of this research is the study and analysis of the international situation of Carpathian Ukraine through the prism of “hybrid war” led by Hungarian and Polish sabotage groups in order to destabilize the domestic political situation in the region. The chronological boundaries of the work

cover the period from October 1938, ie from the first appearance of Hungarian saboteurs, to mid-March 1939 — the aggression and complete occupation of Transcarpathia by the Horthy's Hungary. The methodological basis of the study is the principles of historicism, which allow an objective approach to the study of social processes, events and facts.

Hungarian preparations for the invasion of Carpathian Ukraine did not stop for a moment. Regent of Hungary M. Kozma made an entry in his diary on November 17, 1938: "On the night of the 20th, the Ruthenian region finally will be ours"¹⁵. Germany strongly opposed aggression because it understood very well that the occupation of Transcarpathia by Hungarian troops would lead to the establishment of a common Polish-Hungarian border. On November 18, 1938, E. Vermann presented to the Hungarian leadership the position of Germany, which considered "such a step by the Hungarian side as risky", which could lead to serious complications. E. Vermann reminded that "the new Czechoslovak-Hungarian border was established by the decision of the Vienna Arbitration on the basis of the national principle"¹⁶. This was followed by German and Italian notes to Hungarian Foreign Minister K. Kanya, to which Budapest responded with a memorandum of November 22, 1938. According to it, Hungary was ready to cooperate with Germany, and its government announced its intention to join the anti-Comintern pact and withdraw from the League of Nations. Thus, Hungary's attempt to occupy Transcarpathia on November 20, 1938 ended in complete failure. It was necessary to look for other ways. On November 25, 1938, the Hungarian ambassador to Poland, A. Hori, expressed his views on the taking of the "Ruthenian region... by closing all roads with the help of subversive actions. To prepare by the means of propaganda the population for the plebiscite and at the same time to create the necessary conditions for this by vigorous diplomatic actions"¹⁷.

As early as September 1936, Hitler met with M. Horthy, who initiated later cooperation between the German and Hungarian political and military forces¹⁸. However, at first Berlin did not accept the idea of open intervention and the Hungarian government limited itself to sending terrorist groups to the towns and villages of Carpathian Ukraine. On October 1, 1938, the Prime Minister of Hungary, B. Imredy, secretly instructed the former Minister of the Interior, M. Kozma, to form diversion units to carry out subversive work in Transcarpathia". "At half past ten," M. Kozma wrote in his "Diary", "I was summoned by Imredy and asked to take political leadership of the action in the Ruthenian region, to carry out propaganda there, and to lead the insurgents. He accepted all my suggestions and agreed to use illegal and violent means if the situation will require them"¹⁹. M. Kozma together with I. Geyash created a "guard of rags" ("Sabotchopot") consisting of 600 people²⁰. As early as September 1938, S. Fentsyk began to create terrorist detachments. Black-shirt

gangs were formed in Berehove, Mukachevo and Radvanka. Some of these detachments, which also involved pupils of the "Rus' Scout", were headed by S. Krainyak, B. Baletsky, V. Reberka.

The appearance of Hungarian terrorists was noticed in the first half of October 1938. In the diary of V. Grendzha-Donsky there is an entry: "Yesterday, at 4 o'clock in the morning, Hungarian terrorists appeared in our country. Near the Benya station they attacked the Borzhav railway bridge, killed a soldier who was on guard there, damaged the bridge with ecrasite and attacked the train number 1108. They also killed the station chief, robbed the travelers, captured several of our soldiers and took them with them. They went to Berehove wineries and forests"²¹. V. Grendzha-Donsky attributes the first appearance of Hungarian terrorists to October 10, 1938. P. Stercho also holds a similar point of view: "On the night of October 9-10, 1938, the first group of "Rondos Garda" arrived in the border area of Tarpa, and from there, due to the connection with the Hungarian from Mukachevo Miklovs Erdeli, crossed the border on the Borzhava River and invaded Carpathian Ukraine"²². Ukrainian scientists O. Dovhanych, Z. Pashkuy and M. Troyan believe that the first Hungarian terrorists consisting of 12 people appeared on the territory of Transcarpathia on October 5, 1938²³. However, archival documents that would confirm this fact were not found.

An encrypted telegram from Hungarian Foreign Minister K. Kanya to Ambassador to Poland A. Hori shows that as of October 12, 1938, the Hungarians "managed to throw about 750-800 people into the Ruthenian region. After clashes and acts of sabotage that took place yesterday and the day before yesterday, the Czechs closed the border totally"²⁴. On October 14, 1938, Hungarian terrorists were noticed in the vicinity of Berehove for the second time. A Czech gendarme, A. Ryhan, a native of the village of Dubrynychy, was killed in a clash with them. However, reinforcements arrived in time and the terrorists were forced to retreat. The government newspaper "Nova Svoboda" reported the appearance of 300 armed terrorists near Muzhievo²⁵, and on October, 21, 1938 near Volivets²⁶.

Attacks by Hungarian terrorists became more frequent after the Vienna Arbitration. The commander of the 12th Czechoslovak Division reported that on November 3, 1938, "between 3 and 5 o'clock, terrorists attacked the village of Kosyno... Terrorists were fired with automatic pistols and machine guns, hand grenades were used. A graduate student was killed during the attack... The terrorists used "dum-dum" bullets"²⁷. The same day the Hungarians repeated the attack, in which five Czechoslovak border guards were wounded. On November 4, two terrorists opened fire in Kosynsky Verkh. They were armed with hand grenades and automatic pistols. Three Czechoslovak border guards were lightly wounded in the firefight. On November 5 and 6, armed

incidents were again recorded on the Hungarian-Czechoslovak border, during which one Czech soldier was seriously wounded. On November 9, Hungarian terrorists armed with automatic pistols and hand grenades, launched a new attack on Czechoslovak border guards in Kosyn. A Czech sergeant was killed and five people were injured in the clash²⁸. On November 11, a detachment of twenty Hungarian terrorists was attacked by Czechoslovak troops near the village of Pidhoriany. The Czechoslovak side did not have any losses²⁹. On November 17, an attack by thirty Hungarian terrorists near Strabychov was repulsed. They appeared in Maly Davydkiv on November 21, and on November 22 Czechoslovak border guards in Shalanky detained two terrorists armed with machine guns and automatic pistols. On November 25, 1938, a firefight began near the village of Khlumets, south of Uzhhorod. On the same day, Hungarian terrorists were fired upon near Rakoshyno³⁰. The next day several “fierce terrorists”, led by Michal Gimro, were detained³¹. Hungarian terrorists have appeared in this village many times. The head of the Mukachevo district administration reported on November 28, 1938 to the Presidium of the regional administration in Khust that “the civilian population attacked the guards of a 4/86 company stationed in the yard of a Hungarian school in Rakoshyno, firing automatic pistols”³². The attack was organized by Tor Baka Irzhi, Tor Baka Josef, Molnar Jan, Oleksandr Tar, Stefan Geza Tor, who were suspected of links to Hungarian terrorists in Mukachevo. Three terrorists were killed while trying to escape. The investigation established that a local “Sabatchopot” group was organized in Rakoshyno, and it maintained close ties with Mukachevo and received weapons from there³³.

During December 1938, armed Hungarian terrorists regularly attacked the settlements of Carpathian Ukraine. On December 6, a terrorist was killed in a shootout with Czechoslovak border guards in the village of Bogdan³⁴. On December 7, thirty terrorists from Uzhgorod attacked the village of Dovhe. They were fired with machine guns and shotguns, grenades were used. Having lost one man killed, they retreated in the direction of Uzhgorod. On December 8–9, Transcarpathian border checkpoints were fired from the territory occupied by Hungary. There were no casualties. On December 10, a new attack on the village of Dovhe was recorded, and on December 12 — attack on the village Horyany. During the attack of six terrorists on the settlements of Verbovets and Oleshnyk on December 13, a Czechoslovak border guard was seriously injured and had to have his leg amputated. There were no casualties from terrorists. On December 21, a shootout with terrorists in the Radvanka Forest lasted until dawn. On December 23, terrorists attacked the village of Horyany, and on December 24 — the village of Barvinkosh. On December 25–29, Hungarian planes crossed Czechoslovak airspace several times, but the attack did not take place³⁵. On December 30–31, a group of Hungarian terrorists carried out

several attacks on the village of Makarievo³⁶. One of these attacks was described by “Nova Svoboda” in detail: “Four Hungarian terrorists entered the house and asked if there are finances in the house. They searched the whole house, but found nothing. When they came out of the hut, they threw 6 hand grenades, and then started firing for 20 minutes. Our STOS guard (border units — *Aut.*) responded to the shots of Hungarian terrorists with shots from a light machine gun”³⁷.

V. Komarynsky, who headed the press and propaganda department in the government of Carpathian Ukraine, wrote to the Presidium of the Ministry of Internal Affairs: “I am announcing that in the last few days Hungarian terrorists are starting alarming work at the borders again, they are not ancestral Hungarian terrorists, but on the one hand there are fugitive deserters from our army, and on the other hand there are supporters of Dr. Fentsyk, Brodi and Demko, who fled from our territory to Mukachevo. After the calculation, there are about 300 such people in Mukachevo”³⁸. Thus, we are talking about terrorist groups that began to form in the Transcarpathian territory occupied by Hungary. According to the Czechoslovak Security Service, on January 1, 1939, there were 6,000 terrorists in Uzhgorod, ready to carry out sabotage operations on the territory of Carpathian Ukraine³⁹.

On January 5–6, 1939, “Hungarian terrorists themselves provoked the incident and attacked our border guard. The leaders of these terrorists were former district police inspector Bilyk Ferenc, then Basarab Ferenc, Chulak Todor and Shelebi Miklos. Basarab, Chulak and Shelebi crossed the border near Pidmonastyr — they intended to occupy the Czechoslovak border guard and move further... There were 350 terrorists organized for this attack, almost all of them were Hungarians, 50 of them came directly from Mukachevo, others from the vicinity”⁴⁰. Similar events took place in the vicinity of Uzhgorod. A group of Hungarian terrorists led by Istvan Kalmar attacked the border guard⁴¹. It should be noted that the Bolshevik newspaper “Pravda” noted in its pages “the small skirmishes that took place at this time on the new Czechoslovak borders on the territory of Transcarpathia”⁴².

A great fight took place on January 6, 1939 in the village of Rosvygovo. There were between 200 and 250 terrorists. The fight lasted for two hours, after which the terrorists returned to their territory. Czechoslovak border guards lost one financial guard, one soldier, six were wounded and seven went missing. The terrorists’ losses could not be determined⁴³. On January 16, “Hungarian terrorists attacked the STOS guards near Barvinkosh. There were 60–80 people. Heavy and light machine guns were fired at them from Baranyntsi. The crowd crossed the demarcation line, and even 1 kilometer in the direction to Baranyntsi. Two policemen were wounded on our side”⁴⁴. Similar skirmishes took place on January 2, 1939 in the village of Barbovo⁴⁵. On January 7, terrorists attacked the Czechoslovak STOS unit in Kamianytsia⁴⁶.

Hungarian terrorist groups were constantly replenished with new people. At the same time various methods were used for this, quite often compulsory. "According to reliable evidence," the head of the Sevlyush district administration reported to the Presidium of Subcarpathian Rus', "Hungarians continue to replenish the special formations of "Sabatchopot" and train people recruited in the area, demobilized soldiers and refugees from the area whom they want to use to cause the disorders in our territory. It was found out that on November 14, 1938 two Hungarian recruiters, Vilmos Pap and Layosh Jugas, came in the village of Vyshni Shard in this district and they said that they have been authorized by the Hungarian authorities to recruit in this area 500 people for the Hungarian army. It was later revealed that many young people, including about 30 conscripts who had to enlist in the military this year, had fled to Hungary, where they had been recruited for military training. Demobilized soldier Vamos from Sevliush said here that Hungarian soldiers beat him for refusing to join the so-called "Sabatchopot"⁴⁷. "In the village of Khlumtsi," the local gendarmerie chief reported, "Vince Gortvai and his 10-year-old son... were registering people in their homes... When compiling the list, Gortvai asked people if they recognized themselves as Hungarians, and if the answer was positive, the villagers would write down their own names on the list by their own hand. Gortvai did not tell anyone of the registered the purpose of the census"⁴⁸.

The English journalist Henderson wrote that "in the vicinity of Shalanka, 12 miles east of Berehove, the Czechoslovak army captured 297 Hungarian terrorists, including 26 officers, 62 non-commissioned officers, one graduate student, four Czechoslovak citizens of Hungarian nationality, and the rest were Hungarian revisionists. The documents taken from them indicated that the terrorists had been sent by the General Staff of the Ministry of War. The interrogation of the terrorists proved that the prisoners had been gathered and trained in Kishvard near Tejasband, and were under the command of Lieutenant Istvan Gejas... There are about 2,000 Hungarian terrorists scattered in Ruthenia..."⁴⁹.

As of February 10, 1939, Hungarian terrorists attacked the borders of Carpathian Ukraine 22 times⁵⁰. It should be noted that these are just those skirmishes in which the Carpathian Sich took part. Director of the Police of Carpathian Ukraine Yu. Biley, giving an interview to "Nova Svoboda", stated that "our Ukrainian boys caught two Hungarian terrorists in Khust"⁵¹. Ordinary terrorists were strongly encouraged and rewarded by their leaders. "Terrorist receives 3,5 pengoes a day, 50 pengoes for an attack" — "Nova Svoboda" reported⁵². Proof of the massive terrorist attacks on Carpathian Ukraine is the fact that as of February 25, 1939, the State Prosecutor's Office in Velykyi Berezny had imprisoned 345 Hungarian terrorists⁵³. After the amnesty was announced, they were all released⁵⁴.

In October 1938, the appearance of Polish terrorists was noticed. “During the interwar period, the territory of Transcarpathia was a region that the Polish authorities watched with special attention, — wrote Polish historian D. Dabrowski. — Such interest was initiated, first of all, by the geopolitical role which these lands played after the First World War”⁵⁵. It is worth agreeing with the scientist’s statement that “dislike for Czechoslovakia in the interwar period was felt on both sides of the border. The reasons for the reluctance to resolve mutual conflicts can be found in both Warsaw and Prague. In the 1930s, the ambitions of the architect of the foreign policy of the neighbors were superimposed on mutual disputes. It was no secret that President Benes and Minister Beck did not sympathize with each other. Both sought to emerge as leaders of Central European countries and gave the same role to their states”⁵⁶.

Polish troops, as well as Hungarian, without the official consent of Hitler to invade Carpathian Ukraine, decided to limit themselves to terrorist acts. On October 27, they attempted to explode a bridge near Zhornava, and the next day they attacked a bridge in Vuchkovo. The Czech gendarme Kalchik and several Transcarpathians, in particular, J. Loy, were killed in a fight with them. In the village Torun Polish terrorists killed I. Kost from Synevyr⁵⁷. However, these first terrorist attacks should not be seen as isolated attempts to undermine the stability of the domestic political situation in Czechoslovakia and Carpathian Ukraine. Archival sources, introduced into scientific circulation by D. Dabrowski, testify to a clear military-sabotage operation, which was purposefully carried out by the Polish secret services and became a part of history under the code name “Operation Pinch-bar”.

Major Edmund Kharashkevych, who was appointed leader of the “Pinch-bar” action, identified the following main stages in it: 1) preparation (from 7 to 22 October, 1938); 2) combat and subversive operations (from October 22 to November 12, 1938); 3) guerrilla and sabotage actions (from 17 to 27 November, 1938); 4) termination of actions (from November 28 to December 31, 1938). Major Felix Ankerstein identified three cycles of subversive operations: 1) preparatory (until October 20, 1938); 2) organization and implementation of sabotage operations in Subcarpathian Rus’ together with combat detachments from Rozluch and partisan detachments immediately mobilized with the help of the Riflemen’s Union (from October 20 to November 10, 1938); 3) the organization and formation of guerrilla units, their preparatory actions in anticipation of the order to carry out the action and the completion of the entire action (from November 5 to December 10, 1938)⁵⁸.

D. Dabrowski in his monograph cites the composition of the Polish command of the action “Pinch-bar” in Carpathian Ukraine: Major Felix Ankerstein, pseudonym “Malsky” — commander; Captain Jan Melcharsky, pseudonym “Bonetsky” — Deputy Commander, Commandant of the camp in

Rozluch and of the combat organization; Captain Alexander Romishovsky, alias “Florian” — operational officer; Major Vladislav Novozhenyuk, pseudonym “New” — Commander of the Eastern sabotage subgroup (Stryi — Dolyna — Kalush); Captain Yulian Bortkevych, alias “Bachynsky” — commander of the Western sabotage subgroup (Turka — Lesko — Sanok); Captain Vladislav Guttra, pseudonym “Grodzky” — head of intelligence in Carpathian Ukraine⁵⁹. The latter, who was in Uzhgorod, was covered by a diplomatic passport, “starting from October 12, 1938, he regularly inspected communication networks near Velykyi Bereznyi, Perechyn, Uzhgorod, Svalyava and Serednie. He sent the materials about the objects to be destroyed (high-voltage power lines, bridges, communication lines) to Captain Melcharsky by diplomatic mail”⁶⁰.

On November 10, 1938, the Press Service of Carpathian Ukraine reported that Polish terrorists “had brought to Poland Yaroslav Vesetsky, Vyacheslav Rakos, and Cyris, members of the border guard who are still unknown whether they live”⁶¹. “Nova Svoboda” reported that “the financial directorate in Khust, with the help of the authorities of Carpathian Ukraine, through diplomatic means will seek to ensure that the Polish governments release our defenders of borders”⁶². On the night of November 18–19, 1938, “several dozen Polish terrorists attacked our border guards near Nyzhni Veretsky (Nyzhni Vorota). After the firefight, they were driven away in the direction of the Polish border. The terrorists left one dead and several wounded”⁶³. Attacks by Polish terrorists were recorded on November 2, 3, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, and 22, 1938. Residents of the villages of Torun, Pryslyp, N. Studeny, and Synevyrsk Polyana, which border Poland, were injured⁶⁴.

D. Dabrowski believes that the most tragic moment of the action “Pinch-bar” was an operation carried out under the leadership of Lieutenant Vladislav Volsky. The saboteurs of the latter suddenly attacked on the night of November 15–16, 1938 near the village of Pryslyp. Three saboteurs were killed on the spot, another was killed later by Czechoslovak gendarmes. Vladyslav Hurnitsky, Vladyslav Hoffman and Adam Mikhalkuv died at the scene of the fight. The last fatal victim of the action was, according to the Polish side, its commander... The fate of the dead has not been determined⁶⁵. Information about their death reached the organizers of the action “Pinch-bar” thanks to informants in the Carpathian Ukraine. Their burial places were probably never found. On November 18, 1938, Captain Klepatsky, Roman-Yuzef Karpinsky, and Vavzhynets Urbanyak were killed in a skirmish with Czechoslovak troops. According to Czechoslovak special services, a detachment of Polish saboteurs of up to 100 people fired (and threw grenades) at a post office building in Toruń and a gendarmerie post. The fight lasted since 02.00 to 04.30 on November 22, 1938. The Poles returned after the approach of support forces

from Volove. On their way back, the group exploded a small road bridge near the previously destroyed post office. Although about a hundred grenades were detonated during the more than two-hour fight, no casualties were reported⁶⁶.

From the telephone message of the Hungarian ambassador to Poland, A. Hori, to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, K. Kanya, dated November 9, 1938, it follows that the Poles had doubts about the narrowing of the struggle against Czechoslovakia only to terrorist actions. "The question of the Ruthenian region," wrote A. Hori, "must be resolved quickly and in the most radical way. It is possible that we can achieve the goal only with the help of insurgent units. But what happens if they are defeated? Will we be satisfied with the fact that our attempts failed? It is possible that our insurgent actions will be repulsed by a strike on regular Hungarian troops"⁶⁷. On November 25, 1938, General Vladislav Langner issued an order to disband the guerrilla units. Within a few days, the volunteers had to be released and sent home, and by the beginning of the following month, the equipment, weapons and uniforms had to be returned to the site. Needless personnel and regulars were to return to their places of deployment. By December 10, 1938, all calculations and reports had to be completed. After receiving General Langner's order on November 25, 1938, Major Ankerstein ordered to finish the action "Pinch-bar"⁶⁸. However, it is necessary to agree with D. Dabrowski's conclusion that "information about the end of the action came late, General Langner's order could not be implemented immediately. Czechoslovak documents state that the last Polish attacks lasted from November 26 to 28, 1938. Their victim was a customs officer, who died near Synevyrskaya Polyana"⁶⁹.

Terrorist actions caused great moral and material damage. Only Polish terrorists as of November 25, 1938 caused damage amounting to 277,500 CZK⁷⁰. Residents of the village Torun informed its government that on the 5th of December the terrorists put ecrasite (explosive — *Aut.*) in the notarial government (losses of 3400 CKZ were partially covered by 1500 CKZ), but on December 22, the government was again fired on from all sides by terrorists for 2 hours. 3 grenades were thrown into the building — losses of 5 thousand CKZ"⁷¹. There were casualties after almost every attack. In just a few days in November 1938 there were killed on the Polish-Czech border "3 soldiers, 2 platoon commanders, 1 financial guard, 1 lieutenant, 2 children"⁷². On November 28, 29 and 31, Polish terrorists attacked the village of Vuchkove three times. Polish citizens Bohdan Senczak and Rudolf Pes were detained by the riflemen⁷³. These and other facts are reflected in the reports of the Czechoslovak security service. They recorded the armaments, funding and level of military training of terrorists⁷⁴. The attacks of Polish terrorists did not stop in January-February 1939 as well. Prislip "was attacked by 10 Polish terrorists who occupied the post office. The building of the post office was

bombed with hand grenades and head of the post office Kalyna was killed. Mrs. Kalyna together with her husband defended the mail. Pieces of grenade tore her chest and head”⁷⁵.

The Carpathian-Ukrainian authorities, in response to the protest notes of the Polish ambassador, in which they were accused of promoting anti-Polish propaganda in the region, constantly cited the facts of the destructive activities of the Polish terrorists. On November 13, 1938 in Nyzhni Studeny, a terrorist was killed while crossing the border, with him there was found “a pistol with the “Cerba” badge, a box for cigarettes, a leather wallet with 50 CKZ, 1 polish zloty and 15 Polish grosh in it”⁷⁶. On November 15, 1938, Polish hand grenades, a clock mechanism for lighters, lighters with the inscription “Krakow”, Polish cigarettes, and chocolate were confiscated from the detained Polish terrorists⁷⁷.

On November 23, a group of foreign journalists visited the Transcarpathian villages of Vuchkove, Torun, Pryslyp, and Synevyrska Polyana, which had suffered the most from Polish attacks. The delegation also included German Consul G. Hoffmann, who “inspected everything, photographed not only the places of the attacks, but also the belongings and weapons of the terrorists left on the ground”⁷⁸. On November 27, 1938, “Nova Svoboda” reported: “Today, the German authorities sent notes to the Hungarian and Polish authorities, in which... they are protesting against the sending of terrorists by the Polish General Staff from Osmoloda to Carpathian Ukraine”⁷⁹.

According to Major Ankerstein’s final report, 12 road bridges, one dam, a telephone switchboard and a post office were destroyed (or damaged) as a result of Polish sabotage operations in Carpathian Ukraine. Railway tracks and high-voltage power lines were damaged in one place. Telephone lines were damaged in 27 places. These actions caused complete chaos and even panic among the Czechoslovak gendarmes, military units and border services in the northern, mountainous part of Transcarpathia. According to the commander of the “Pinch-bar” operation, the enemy lost 23 killed, 15 wounded, 20 captured, taken to Poland, and 5 captured, disarmed and released on the spot. The losses on the part of the protesters amounted to 11 dead (including 8 killed and 3 executed) and 7 wounded. Three people (two of them wounded) were taken as prisoners, and three more went missing⁸⁰. However, this information is difficult to consider accurate. Undoubtedly, D. Dabrowski is right when he states: “All the information provided about both one’s own losses and the losses of the enemy should be treated very carefully, as it differs from the reports compiled by the Czechoslovak side. It is also unknown whether the list of Polish losses is accurate. The reports of the Second Division of the General Staff do not contain data on the fate of the leaders who were not registered as participants in the action. Their function often depended on the tasks. It seems

that some people were only interested in the positive outcome of the actions, often refusing to participate in dangerous or risky operations...⁸¹. The total balance of financial costs per “Pinch-bar” action was approximately 250,000 zlotys⁸². It is an indisputable fact that Poland’s “hybrid war” in Carpathian Ukraine could not be hidden. The Czechoslovak authorities published information on this topic that reached the foreign press, which significantly complicated the Czechoslovak-Polish relations at the time. The main thing that the Polish authorities wanted was to establish a common Hungarian-Polish border, but this was not achieved at the end of 1938. This will be done only in March 1939, when the Horthy’s troops will completely capture the territory of Carpathian Ukraine.

It should be noted that the Czechoslovak government paid considerable attention to the protection of the region’s borders. Joint combat operations of STOS and Carpathian Sich detachments to neutralize terrorist groups were often carried out. One such operation resulted in the defeat of Joseph Prem’s group⁸³. The same fate befell Ernest Berzewitzi’s group. 24 officers, 62 non-commissioned officers and more than 200 ordinary terrorists were taken prisoner.

Not only settlements where only the Ukrainian population lived suffered. Attacks by Hungarian terrorists on the Romanian villages of Maramures intensified. The “Order of the Brave”, founded by M. Horthy in 1920, took an active position. Of the many organizations of this type, the so-called “free detachments” headed by the aforementioned Geyash had the worst reputation⁸⁴. The main task of these gangs was to exterminate the non-Hungarian population in this area, and their program was set out in the brochure by Decho Chaba, published in 1939. It said that the Hungarian nation is the brightest representative of the Mongol ruling race, which knows only victory, and in whose veins the blood of Attila, Arpad, and Genghis Khan boils. “I do not wait,” wrote D. Chaba, “for revenge. I’m not waiting! I destroy every vlach that comes my way. I will destroy everyone! I will not delay. I will light villages at night — Wallachian villages. I will cut the whole population with a sword, I will poison all the wells and even destroy the children in the cradles, I will destroy these scoundrels in general! There will be no exception for anyone!”⁸⁵. One of the leaders of the “Crossed Arrows” Party, Miwau, emphasized back in 1938 that “Hungary’s National Socialism aims to ensure Hungary’s superiority along the entire Danube”⁸⁶.

Among the terrorist gangs, a detachment led by Nod Migali “from the Ungwar unit” was especially dangerous. He, like his wards, was fluent in Ukrainian and Romanian. The attacks of Hungarian terrorists kept the local population in constant fear. Numerous cases of people fleeing to Romania, including the city of Targu Mures, have been reported. The situation worsened

even more when the territory was occupied by Hungary. Archival documents testify to the constant repression against the local population, in which terrorists took an active part. The facts of bullying of people who did not speak Hungarian were recorded. Protests against the fascist regime followed, in particular in Velykyi Bychkiv⁸⁷. Thus, terrorist gangs penetrated into the settlements of Maramures, where the Romanian population lived. Their actions did not differ from those in the central part of Carpathian Ukraine.

Attempts were made to strengthen the border troops. V. Komarinsky suggested “all the guards... to fasten, and that: on the section of the border between Zaluzh and Mukachevo about 30 people, and between the village of Stary Davydkov and Chomonnyk about 20 people”⁸⁸. Normal relations were established between the commander of the Volove Sich forces, S. Figura, and the Czechoslovak border guards. Guard detachments were fortified in the villages of Torun, Pryslyp, and Synevyrskaya Polyana. “In mid-November,” H. Yavorenko recalled, “the Sich people arrived in Torun under the command of... engineer Volyansky”. At that time, the composition of the garrison fluctuated between 20 and 25 people... The garrison was divided into three groups ... Each group numbered 6–7 people, having only one flintlock and one revolver and 6 grenades per group. The terrorists, apparently informed by local spies and their intelligence about our arrival, no longer dared to attack the neighborhood we were defending”⁸⁹. However, it is difficult to agree with the latter statement. Although the attacks of Polish terrorists were not so massive, they did not stop.

Additional sets for the gendarmerie were announced. On February 5, 1939, “Nova Svoboda” published an announcement stating that “more gendarmes will be admitted to the gendarmerie of Carpathian Ukrainian for test”⁹⁰. The conditions of admission to the gendarmerie were as follows:

- 1) has a regional affiliation to Carpathian Ukraine,
- 2) is impeccable, full-fledged and mentally capable,
- 3) has passed 21, and has not reached 35 years of life,
- 4) is an unmarried or childless widower,
- 5) is physically strong and healthy and is at least 165 cm tall,
- 6) knows the Ukrainian language perfectly in word and writing,
- 7) proves that he has at least completed public school,
- 8) has military training, performed military service with a weapon, for at least such time as the military law prescribes for normal pre-trial service.

The request must be accompanied by a declaration signed by two witnesses that in the event of admission to the gendarmerie, the candidate undertakes to serve in the gendarmerie for four years”⁹¹.

According to our calculations, only in February–March, 1939 278 people wrote statements with the request to enroll them in gendarmerie⁹². Even

members of the intelligentsia expressed such a desire. M. Buksar, who worked as a teacher in the village of Zavosyno (V. Berezhnyi district) wrote: "Now all the security of our young state is in the hands of the gendarmerie, and just in the staff of the gendarmerie there are no sons of the Ukrainian people, who are so necessary to maintain security against enemies — active at the borders, so as passive — propaganda"⁹³. The process of Ukrainization of the gendarmerie took place in this form. Although, it should be noted that it passed rather slowly. As of February 1939, "there are about 900 gendarmes in Carpathian Ukraine, including 106 Ukrainians"⁹⁴. There have been cases of rewarding people who detained a terrorist. On November 17, 1938, the head of the Chancellery of the Presidium of Carpathian Ukraine M. Latsanych issued an order about public acquaintance of the population with the government's decision to "pay a reward for catching foreign terrorists"⁹⁵. In February 1939, anyone who "handed over or betrayed a provocative agent or a terrorist from a foreign state to careless authorities would be paid a reward of 500 kcs"⁹⁶.

The Government of Carpathian Ukraine in a relatively short period of time managed to convince the population of the need for national protection of the region's borders. A resident of the village Synevyrska Polyana, I. Loboda, wrote in a letter to his father: "You, father, stand in your place and defend our borders from the Magyars, and we here in the neighborhood will watch our traitors and ruthlessly destroy Polish bandits... Single Polish bandits during a day hide in our forests, and at night they do their devilish work"⁹⁷. Self-defense units were established in all villages bordering Poland.

Despite the measures taken to combat the attacks of Hungarian and Polish terrorists, A. Voloshyn understood all their danger very well. It was for this reason that he ordered the temporary closure of the borders. In particular, it stated: "In order to ensure the peaceful conduct of the elections... I close all the demarcation lines to the Kingdom of Hungary and to the Republic of Poland with immediate validity. This closure... will last until twelve o'clock on Monday, February 13, 1939"⁹⁸. Terrorist attacks did not stop since October 1938 till March 1939. V. Grendzha-Donsky wrote that they "terrorized and intimidated the people"⁹⁹. A. Voloshyn stated that "terrorist attacks are not in the interest of good neighborly coexistence and that it is an act extremely unusual in the history of international relations"¹⁰⁰. He was also forced to admit that "Carpathian Ukraine is not in a position to repel their attacks"¹⁰¹. After the invasion of the Horthy's troops on the territory of Carpathian Ukraine, terrorists joined the Hungarian army en masse and took a direct part in the repressions not only against the representatives of the Carpathian Sich, but also against the civilian population of the region.

The short-lived existence of Carpathian Ukraine coincided with a sharp aggravation of the international situation in Central Europe and the emergence

of an acute political crisis in the Czechoslovak Republic, of which Transcarpathia was a part throughout the interwar period. The Munich Conference and the Vienna Arbitration (October–November 1938) not only signaled the beginning of the disintegration of the Czechoslovak Republic, but also significantly worsened the situation in Transcarpathia, to which Hungary, fully supported by Poland, constantly made territorial claims. Although Germany satisfied Budapest's demands only in March 1939, Hungarian saboteurs, enlisting the support of the Polish saboteurs, carried out constant terrorist actions on territory of the region, thus destabilizing its domestic political situation. A. Voloshyn's government together with the Czechoslovak troops made a lot of efforts to protect the settlements of Carpathian Ukraine from the destructive actions of enemy saboteurs. The formed divisions of the Carpathian Sich and the Ukrainian gendarmerie were involved in the defense of the borders. Having received Germany's consent to the occupation of Carpathian Ukraine, Hungarian troops crossed the border. Without encountering any resistance from the Czechoslovak troops, they occupied the entire territory of the region during March 15–18, 1939. Hungarian saboteurs actively joined the ranks of the Hungarian army and took a direct part in the mass repressions against the defenders of Carpathian Ukraine. The events of 1938–1939 in Carpathian Ukraine clearly prove that the semi-hidden “hybrid war”, waged against the young Ukrainian state by Hungarian and Polish saboteurs, gradually escalated into open aggression by Horthy's Hungary. Some parallels can be drawn with the events of 2014 in Ukraine, when Russian troops annexed Crimea and occupied part of Donetsk and Luhansk regions. In 1938–1939, the governments of Hungary and Poland assured the world community that their troops did not exist in Transcarpathia. Similar was the position of the leadership of the Russian Federation concerning the events of 2014–2021 in Ukraine.

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² Стерчо П. Урядова координація операцій мадярських і польських терористів у Карпатській Україні в 1938–1939 рр. *Державність*. 1993. № 1. С. 15–24.

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⁴ Співак Б.І. Нариси історії революційної боротьби трудящих Закарпаття в 1930–1945 роках. Львів, 1963. 381 с.

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⁷ Закарпаття 1919–2009 років: історія, політика, культура (україномовний варіант українсько-угорського видання). За ред. М. Вегеша, Ч. Фединець; [Редколег. Ю. Остапеч, Р. Офіцинський, Л. Сорко, М. Токар, С. Черничко; Відп. за вип. М. Токар]. Ужгород: Ліра, 2010. 720 с.; *Kárpátalja 1919–2009: történelem, politika, kultúra. F ő s z e r k e s z t ő*: Fedinec Csilla, Vehes Mikola Argumentum MTA Etnikai-nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézete, 2010. 640 old.; *Karpatalja 1938–1941. Magyar es Ukran Törtenei kozelites*. Szerkesztette: Fedinec Csilla. Budapest: Teleki Laszlo Alapitvany, 2004. 277 old.

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⁹ Пагіря О. Карпатська Україна в документах Другої Чехо-Словацької республіки: у 2-х книгах. Львів: Видавництво Українського Католицького Університету, 2020. Кн. 1. 352 с.; Пагіря О. Карпатська Україна в документах Другої Чехо-Словацької республіки: у 2-х книгах. Львів: Видавництво Українського Католицького Університету, 2020. Кн. 2. 862 с.

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