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Continuities and Discontinuities of the Central-European Conscription: The Carpathian Ruthenia in Czechoslovakia 1918-1938

This research project proposes to investigate the modernizing effects of obligatory universal military service in Czechoslovakia with an accent on the peripheral territory of the Carpathian Ruthenia and its inhabitants.

The process of military modernization is an example of the state-led transformations that were accomplished during the 19th century in Europe. The introduction of universal military service for all adult male citizens was a major factor for change, notwithstanding the regional or national peculiarities of any particular country. The most widespread military concept of this time was *universal conscription* – an obligation for all physically fit young men to serve in the army for a short period of one to three years. Many countries made compulsory military service an important element of the complex of civil rights and obligations, emphasizing the correlation of military service and citizenship. Another important component of military service was its universality and importance for the integration and education of the population. The imperial and republican regimes of this period introduced complex programs of nation-building into the military service, so that they consisted of not only shooting and marching practice but also elaborate efforts to educate and improve the subject population to meet the needs of the state.

The development of the conscription concept during the Interwar Period was closely associated with the general character of newly emerged states. Czechoslovakia became a democracy, contrary to the majority of authoritarian and nationalistic neighboring countries. During its short reign it tried to construct the Czechoslovak nation, but also had to deal with its minorities, namely Germans and Hungarians. For the territory of Carpathian Ruthenia (Podkarpatská Rus, later Rusinsko), the Interwar Period became a time of national and cultural revival, provided by the Czechoslovak government. There were also some political dichotomies: while the cultural autonomy was provided, the assimilation and integration was an obligatory element for those who wanted to develop further. Military service is one of the best examples of such dichotomies because it was used for the integration and assimilation of minorities.

Objectives

By fulfilling this research project, I would like to demonstrate the processes of change in both the social and national life of the First Czechoslovak Republic caused by the implementation of universal male conscription. While doing this I will make emphasis on the development of the territory of the republic's periphery – the Carpathian Ruthenia and its population.

During this analysis, I will try to find parallels and continuities of the Austro-Hungarian and Czechoslovak legacy of military service regulations, the same as evaluating the personal impact of military service on the life and development of local citizens.

Methodology

This study focuses on underdeveloped peripheral regions, which experienced only partial modernization until the second half of the 20th century and often were centers of traditionalism, opposing the state efforts to induce change. Nationally diverse states devised the most interesting strategies for integrating their citizens into the modern state. Military service was a challenge for those who were not accustomed to the new lifestyle, especially for the inhabitants of rural peripheries.

The main methodology of this proposal is the study of the situation in peripheral areas with an accent on the personal experiences and developments of those who came through universal military service in the army of Czechoslovakia. While doing this I will try to find parallels, continuities, and discontinuities of the situation in the Carpathian Ruthenia during the Habsburg rule and the Interwar Period.

I am interested to conduct this research in Munich because of its importance as a center of Ukrainian Interwar and the post-WWII diaspora. That is why I suppose to find materials needed, the same as ego-documents that are stored in the funds of the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Bayerisches Hauptstaatsarchiv, Archivs des Institutes für Zeitgeschichte, and Staatsarchiv München.

Outcomes

The main planned outcome of this fellowship would be the collection of the material and conceptualization of the article about the continuities and discontinuities of military developments of Central Europe during the first half of the 20th century. It would be the component of a broader project on the history of universal conscription in Europe.

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