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*Olena Humeniuk*

UKRAINIAN STUDENT MOVEMENT  
IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA IN THE 1920–1930S:  
BRIEF OUTLINE

The theme of Ukrainian student emigration in Czechoslovak Republic (CSR) in 1920–1930s represents an issue that has lost none of its currency in the study of contemporary history. It is explored within the context of Ukrainian emigration in the European countries. But we should admitted, that they were essential part of Ukrainian emigration. Student emigration had its peculiarities, mostly social and legal, which depended on to governmental policies on emigrants in different European countries. Young Ukrainians in Czechoslovak Republic had major influence on the entire Ukrainian emigration in Europe. They determined not only scientific and cultural work, but also designed new, modern Ukrainian political system abroad. This makes it useful to explore the origins of Ukrainian student presence and activities in Czechoslovak Republic, their numbers, foundations and work of their organizations, attitude of the Czech Government to emigrants from the territories of the former Russian Empire and the Ukrainian question in that context.

The main reason for Ukrainians to emigrate in the early 1920s was the defeat of the national-liberation struggle in 1917–1921. At the beginning of the 1920s, Ukrainian emigration consisted mostly of former soldiers of the Army of Ukrainian National Republic and the Army of Western Ukrainian National Republic, who were interned in the Poland locations of Wadowice, Kalish, Lancut, Oleksandruw-Kujawski, Sedlice, and in the Czech camps of Josefov, Liberec, Německé Jablonné etc.<sup>1</sup> Yet in the middle of the 1920s, students became the main component of Ukrainian emigration. After the closure of the internment camps in 1923–1924, the greatest number of the former interns were admitted to the universities in

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<sup>1</sup> Срібняк, І., *Україниці на чужині. Полонені та інтерновані вояки-українці в країнах Центральної та Південно-Східної Європи (1919–1924 рр.)*, Київ 2000, 20–45; *Central State Archive in Prague*, fond Ministry of Foreign Affairs – Russian Aid (MFA – RPA), box 50.

Central-European countries and even to Ukrainian high schools that opened in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s. They included the Ukrainian Free University (established in Vienna at the beginning of 1921, but relocated to Prague six months later), Ukrainian Pedagogical Institute named after M. Drahomanov in Prague, Ukrainian Agricultural Academy in Poděbrady, and others. The development of these processes had its root in the establishment of cultural and educational organizations in the internment camps. Former soldiers of the Army of Ukrainian National Republic and the Army of Western Ukrainian National Republic were thus given an opportunity to complete their secondary schooling offered through special courses and educational organizations in the camps. Afterwards they had been able to enroll in European and Ukrainian universities.<sup>2</sup>

Other source for the Ukrainian student movement in the interwar Czechoslovakia included politicians and civil servants of the Government of Ukrainian National Republic and Western Ukrainian National Republic who hadn't been able (because of multitude of largely political reasons) to study at universities in Ukraine. Most young emigrants were nationals of Ukrainian National Republic and Western Ukrainian National Republic,<sup>3</sup> who had taken part in the national-liberation struggle in 1917–1921. Yet there were also students from Eastern Galicia and Volhynia – Ukrainian territories that were officially attached to Poland after the World War I and the Polish-Soviet war of 1920 (according to international agreements from 14th March 1923).<sup>4</sup> In Western Ukrainian territories, as part of Poland, Ukrainian students were banned from attending the universities.<sup>5</sup> Those Ukrainian students who didn't support the new regime, had to find new possibilities to study in Europe.<sup>6</sup> Young Ukrainians from the Carpathian region (attached to Czechoslovakia after the World War I) studied mostly at Czechoslovakian higher schools.

Hence, the defining feature of the interwar Ukrainian émigré student community was one's military history. Most of them were young people aged 20–35 years who fought in the World War I and the national-liberation struggle in 1917–1921 within the Army of Ukrainian National Republic or Western Ukrainian National Republic. Another group, less numerous included those, who had no possibility (again largely due to political reasons) to study in Ukraine in the interwar period.

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<sup>2</sup> Сімянцев, В., *Студентські часи (Спогади): Чехословаччина 1923–1929 рр.*, Вашингтон 1973, 37.

<sup>3</sup> Karpus, Z., *Jeńcy i internowani rosyjscy i ukraińscy w Polsce w latach 1918–1924*, Toruń 1991, 120.

<sup>4</sup> *National Library of the Czech Republic*, Slavonic Library, fond T-USUS (Central Union of Ukrainian Students), box 22, 10.

<sup>5</sup> *National Library of Poland*, Archives of the Shevchenko Scientific Society, microfilm 68730, 13.

<sup>6</sup> *National Library of the Czech Republic*, Slavonic Library, fond T-UHA (Ukrainian Agricultural Academy), box 21, 2–4.

Naturally, young people such active past (participants in the constitutional process in Ukraine during 1917–1921) were not considered to be average students, but future conscious, educated, qualified forces to facilitate the renaissance of the independent state.<sup>7</sup> Another important student challenge was to represent Ukrainian nation at internationally.

Therefore, emigrant students had to present themselves as members of an independent nation with rich culture and ancient history. The challenges they faced were similar to those faced by European youth, in particular in the interwar period: “The new social world, new forms of life require new people. We conclude that academic area should become a kind of base for the new political thought, with the essential content that lays in the belief in the current conditions of such diverse political life and in the decline of previous ideas. We are parting from with the current student psychology of apolitical national.”<sup>8</sup>

After all wars and nation-liberation struggles, Ukrainians at the beginning of the 1920s created new type of student emigrants. They had two important objectives: to graduate from the universities, became true professionals and continue the struggle for independence for their country. The head of the Ukrainian Central Committee abroad characterized the role of students in 1921 as follows: “...give our young people the opportunity to acquire knowledge and experience, so that they can return to an independent and free Ukraine as intelligent professionals with experience and help our people to rebuild culture and economy of our destroyed homeland.”<sup>9</sup>

Ukrainian students thus faced the challenges to preserve national identity, struggle for the rebirth of the state, whilst the main one was to graduate from the university. The presentation of Ukraine among foreign community was the major task they were entrusted with and was successfully fulfilled by a number of student organizations.

Students were one of the largest groups of Ukrainian émigré community in Czechoslovakia. Their numbers there during the interwar period reached circa 2 000.<sup>10</sup> It is still difficult to ascertain the precise number of students in Czechoslovakia because of a number of reasons. The main is a lack of statistical data, which differ in official Czech documents and materials of the Ukrainian émigré organizations. Hence, according to the statistics of the Ministry of Schooling and National Education on concerning Ukrainians emigrants in CSR of 9th August 1929, there were 469 students in Czech high schools.<sup>11</sup> For example,

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<sup>7</sup> *National Library of Poland*, Archives of the Shevchenko Scientific Society, microfilm 79911, 58.

<sup>8</sup> *Archives of Modern Records in Warsaw*, fond 75, box 18, 3–4.

<sup>9</sup> *Central State Archive of Supreme Bodies and Authority of Ukraine*, fond 3570, part 1, box 5, 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Central State Archive in Prague*, MFA – RPA, box 50.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*.

Ukrainian Academic Committee kept its own statistics: there were 1 060 Ukrainian students to graduate from Czech high schools during 1921–1931.<sup>12</sup> Another rather important characteristic of emigrants was their origin. Ukrainian student emigrants in Czechoslovakia came especially from the so-called Greater Ukraine – from Central Ukrainian territories (nationals of the Ukrainian National Republic), and the second group were presented by young people from Western Ukraine.<sup>13</sup>

Economic conditions of the Ukrainian students are another issue to be explored here. After the World War I, organizations such as the European Relief Fund (later International Student Service), World Federation of Christian Students, Methodist Mission,<sup>14</sup> and Red Cross provided help for emigrants. In Czechoslovakia, Ukrainians received aid not only from international funds and organizations. They also enjoyed support from the so-called Russian Relief Campaign of the Czechoslovak Government.<sup>15</sup> The campaign founded the Ukrainian Public Committee and the Czech-Ukrainian Committee at the beginning of the 1920s. Using the funds of the Russian Relief Campaign, they organized aid for Ukrainian students.<sup>16</sup> Majority of Ukrainian student emigrants in Czechoslovakia studied at the universities for free, moreover with a monthly scholarship. For example, in the academic year 1922/1923, 1 990 Ukrainian students received state scholarships.<sup>17</sup> In 1923, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs earmarked a monthly amount of 520 Czechoslovak crown as state scholarship for Ukrainian and Russian students.<sup>18</sup> During the 1930s, the Czech Government closed the Russian Relief Campaign.

Material aid to Ukrainian students wasn't always enough to make their living in Czechoslovakia. They also received aid from international organizations, such as the World Student's Christian Federation (WSCF) that provided different types of support, such as tuition fee for the poorest students; minimum amount

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<sup>12</sup> *National Library of the Czech Republic*, Slavonic Library, fond T-UAK (Ukrainian Academic Committee), box 62, 34.

<sup>13</sup> Чумак, В., Українське студентство в ЧСР, *Діло*, 1924, № 226, 3; *National Library of the Czech Republic*, Slavonic Library, T-UHA, box 2, 9.

<sup>14</sup> *Central State Archive in Prague*, MFA – RPA, box 51.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, box 50, 51, 52, 53; *National Library of the Czech Republic*, Slavonic Library, T-UAK, box 1–18.

<sup>16</sup> Вацулик, Я., Меморандум Вацлава Гирсы о помощи русским и украинским эмигрантам, направленный в Лигу Наций, in: *Русская акция помощи в Чехословакии: история, значение, наследие*, Прага 2012, 263–268; Коваленко, С., Украинский высший педагогический институт имени М. П. Драгоманов в Праге как культурно-образовательный центр украинской диаспоры в ЧСР, in: *Русская акция помощи в Чехословакии: история, значение, наследие*, Прага 2012, 97–104.

<sup>17</sup> Сладек, З., Русская эмиграция в Чехословакии: развитие «русской акции», *Славяноведение*, 1993, № 4, 34.

<sup>18</sup> *Central State Archive in Prague*, MFA – RPA, box 52.

per month for the poorest students; food for some categories of students; payment of dormitory fees; clothing supplies; medical assistance; textbooks and schoolwork accessories.<sup>19</sup> Students only used the aid of WSCF during the first part of the 1920s. Similar aid came from the Methodist Mission to CSR.<sup>20</sup> In the 1930s, economic situation of Ukrainian students was quite difficult in result of the economic crisis, and due to a lack of organized support from international, governmental and emigrant organizations.

In June 1922, a congress was held that brought together 5 000 Ukrainian students in Prague. It established Central Ukrainian Student Relief Fund. Social and economic situation of Ukrainian students was quite different from that of students from other countries. The congress delegates stated that:

- Ukrainian students cannot receive any support from their own nation;
- the international donor organizations are indifferent about Ukrainian students;
- Ukrainian students couldn't earn their daily bread even by hard work;
- the world doesn't yet accept the emergence of the new Ukrainian nation in the international arena and, by the same token, the struggle and needs of Ukrainian students;
- political circumstances have deprived Ukrainian students of their rights, especially of the right to live in their own country;
- in other countries (where Ukrainian students currently reside as refugees), the so-called hospitality along with poor material situation made it very difficult or sometimes, quite impossible for Ukrainian students to continue their studies;
- at last, Ukrainian students are deprived of their own schools, and even if they wanted to study, they had to organize and keep their own schools, by their own effort and means.<sup>21</sup>

These were the main reasons for the foundation of the Central Union of Ukrainian Student (CeSUS) in 1922. The relief organization provided serious supply for Ukrainian students predominantly in Czechoslovak Republic, but also in other European countries. After its closure in 1924, Central Union of Ukrainian Students (which was also founded at the same congress), became the main relief organization for student emigrants.

Still, without attention that was given to all difficulties, Ukrainian students conducted cultural and educational work in their organizations trying to achieve some major objectives, such as the preservation of national memory (Ukrainian traditions, culture, history), popularization of knowledge about Ukraine among

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<sup>19</sup> *Central State Archive of Supreme Bodies and Authority of Ukraine, fond 3570, part 1, box 16, 152.*

<sup>20</sup> *Central State Archive in Prague, MFA – RPA, box 51.*

<sup>21</sup> *National Library of the Czech Republic, Slavonic Library, T-USUS, box 21, 3.*



international community, cooperation between Ukrainian students and their colleagues from other countries.

Prague, Poděbrady, Brno, Příbram, and Bratislava were the key centres of Ukrainian student emigrants in Czechoslovakia. During the interwar period, Ukrainian students founded in Czechoslovakia more than two hundred<sup>22</sup> academic, educational, professional, cultural, sports, and political organizations.

The biggest of them had own structure and network. For example, Ukrainian Academic Organization (UAO) in Prague was established in 1919. It was student's organization with numerous sections, such as: medical, law, mathematics, economics, science, agronomists, art and painting, drama, choir.<sup>23</sup> In 1924 the number of UAO was 374 members.<sup>24</sup>

UAO activities in Prague were carried out in such directions: international, cultural and social. Students of this organization maintained friendly cooperation with other Ukrainian and foreign communities in Czechoslovakia and elsewhere in Europe.<sup>25</sup> Ukrainians often held celebrations marking key dates of national history or other holidays, to which they kept inviting international student guests, including Czech, German or Belorussian. The activities of UAO was essentially cultural and educational. Each Saturday UAO members of held meetings to discuss political, economic, cultural situation in Ukraine.<sup>26</sup>

In the second decade of the interwar period, Ukrainian student organizations served exclusively professional role, providing assistance for their members and engaging in cultural and educational work. Intensity of their work dramatically decreased. With the outbreak of World War II, majority of Ukrainian student organizations in Czechoslovakia ceased.<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

A good number of Ukrainian student and academic organizations were founded and active in Czechoslovakia during the interwar period. Responsibilities, forms and methods of their activity were similar and largely connected to cultural and

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> З життя українського студентства, *Студентський вісник*, 1926, № 2, 27.

<sup>24</sup> *Central State Archive in Prague*, MFA – RPA, box 50.

<sup>25</sup> Наріжний, С., *Українська еміграція: культурна праця української еміграції між двома світовими війнами*, ч. 1, Прага 1942, 136.

<sup>26</sup> *National Library of the Czech Republic*, Slavonic Library, fond T-UVA (Ukrainian Scientific Association), box 2, 14.

<sup>27</sup> Наріжний, С., *Українська еміграція: культурна праця української еміграції між двома світовими війнами*, ч. 1, Прага 1942, 138.

educational spheres. The main responsibility of their members was to present Ukraine, its history, culture and tradition internationally. Young people preserved and popularised national traditions and historic memory. They became the force, able to sustain the existence of their nation. They safeguarded future life for the next generations of determined nationals within the renewed Ukraine.

Among numerous student's organizations the Central Union of Ukrainian Student (the Ukrainian abbreviation – CeSUS) stands out. Founded in Prague in 1922, it brought together majority student organizations and individuals. CeSUS had its elected President and structure arranged in different departments: economic, educational, cultural, publishing, international. CeSUS succeeded internationally sphere, chiefly due to the Head of the International Department, Vasyl Oreletsky. It became member of the International Confederation of Students.<sup>28</sup> The key responsibilities of the Union included material and juridical aid to Ukrainian student emigrants, presentation of student movement and emigration in internationally, and the advancement of national culture and education.

Publishing was one of the most influential operations on the part of CeSUS.<sup>29</sup> *Student Herald* was the main periodical of the Union. It covered a range of issues, particularly student and youth movement of Ukrainian emigration, political, economic, cultural situation in Ukraine, international news. Often young Ukrainian authors published here their poetry and prose.<sup>30</sup> *Student Herald* and other student magazines, newspapers, and brochures made valuable contribution in presenting Ukrainian nation internationally. Such information in English and other foreign languages proved essential, as it provided short outline of essential Ukrainian matters, and was distributed to student unions or international organizations.<sup>31</sup>

During the interwar period, Czechoslovakia was the most important centre for Ukrainians. It gave home to different groups of emigrants: former soldiers of the Army of Ukrainian Western National Republic and Army of Ukrainian National Republic, politicians, scientists, students, etc. The positive attitude by the of Czechoslovak Government and international aid, Ukrainians were given opportunities to found out their numerous organizations and engage in cultural and educational work. It was only in Czechoslovakia that Ukrainians established higher academic institutions, universities, secondary schools during the interwar period.

The main people who entered the Ukrainian student emigration were the former interns from the camps – soldiers from the Army of Ukrainian National

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<sup>28</sup> *National Library of the Czech Republic, Slavonic Library, T-USUS, box 16, 5.*

<sup>29</sup> Гузар, Л., *В Роковини: українське студентство в минулому й сучасному*. ЦеСУС, Прага 1938, 19.

<sup>30</sup> Антонович, М., *Нариси історії Центрального Союзу Українського Студентства (1922–1945)*, Мюнхен – Нью-Йорк – Торонто 1976, 45.

<sup>31</sup> *National Library of the Czech Republic, Slavonic Library, T-USUS, box 20, 1.*

Republic and Army of Western Ukrainian National Republic. Their material conditions were good enough, because of the governmental Russian Relief Campaign designated for refugees from the former Russian Empire.

Young people founded numerous organizations in Czechoslovakia. The tasks put before them included the preservation of national identity, reconstruction of the state, international information about Ukrainian students, their country, culture, history, and traditions. It was largely through the cultural work that the students presented their nation internationally. Cultural and educational work was the main area of activity in these organizations. Through their organizations, young people represented Ukrainian nation as the part of European community with the heroic history and outstanding cultural achievements.

## ABSTRACT

### **Ukrainian Student Movement in Czechoslovakia in the 1920–1930s: Brief Outline**

*Olena Humeniuk*

The article explores Ukrainian student movement in Czechoslovakia in the period of 1920–1939. The role of Ukrainian students' organizations in the interwar period is analyzed through the lens of extensive documentary sources. The article describes structure and activity of Ukrainian student movement in Czechoslovakia, including numbers of students within the entire Ukrainian community in Czechoslovakia, their material conditions, types of organizations and their activities, challenges the students faced and their influence on emigrants, their role in future rebirth of the independent Ukrainian state. The paper also highlights the instrumental role Czechoslovak Republic played for Ukrainian émigré community and its specific governmental policy on foreigners.

**Key words:** Ukrainian, Emigrants, Student, Organizations, Czechoslovak Republic.

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