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Identities in Flux: Ukrainian Nation Building Process

Abstract

This study seeks to analyse conflicting processes of identity re-definition in post-Soviet Ukraine. Particularly it focuses on the changes in the construction of national identity in Ukraine after ‘Euromaidan Revolution’ 2013-2014. Following constructivist’s approach, I consider identities in Ukraine not as fixed and objective, but blurred, situational, multi-layered etc.

The image of the ‘Russia’ as ‘Empire’ plays an extremely important role in creating the image of the Ukrainian ‘self’. Post-colonial elements in Ukrainian discussion about identity provide us a useful framework to understand the Soviet imperial legacy and specifics of nation building in post-Soviet era.

Can we explain turbulence events in Ukraine based on the regional model of division with references to linguistic and ethnic split? I suppose it is big simplification that leads to misunderstanding, because the main dividing lines in Ukrainian society base not so on the regional, but on the generational, social and value differences.

Keywords: *Ukraine, identity, postcoloniality, nation-building.*

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Preface

The issue of identity is one of the most divisive elements in post-Soviet Russian and Ukrainian societies, a perpetual source of conflict that influence their relation and foreign policy. The current Russian-Ukrainian conflict can be analysed as a result of unfinished disintegration of the Soviet Union (Polegkyi 2016a). At the same time, one of the most visible consequences of events in Ukraine is a dramatic change in Ukrainian national identity (Kulyk 2016). This study seeks to identify and analyse conflicting processes of identities construction in post-Soviet Ukraine. Particularly I will focus on the analysis of changes in the definition of national identity after ‘Euromaidan Revolution’ 2013-2014 in Ukraine.

It is common view that national identity is a sense of belonging to a particular cultural or ethnic group. But what are the bases underlining such belonging? If it is slightly easier to describe the limit of ethnicity in homogeneous society with clear ethnic and linguistic boundaries, it is very difficult to draw such border in case of mixed families, bilingual users of Russian and Ukrainian language etc. It became even more complex problem in the case of civic identity built mainly on the basis of political choice and identity determinate by different value sets, worldview and political stance – what we can observe in Ukraine particularly after ‘Euromaidan revolution’ and ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war.

Indeed, Ukrainian society is deeply divided in relations to many issues, with the differences rooted in history, language, mentality, and aspirations for the future. But the main question - what is the main basis for this dividing? Can we sufficiently explain turbulence events in Ukraine based on the regional model of division with references to linguistic and ethnic split? Some scholars and politicians tried to explain dramatic events in Ukraine as an internal conflicts even ‘civic war’ based on the serious differences between east and west parts of country and contradictive identities. But it is enormous simplification to explain the rise of pro-Russian movements in the south and east of Ukraine by the rapid shift in collective identity of the local population. Rather, as Tatiana Zhurzhenko (2014) claims, „national identities in the Ukrainian-Russian borderlands have shifted and crystallized in response to dramatic political events, while internal as well as external political actors have made use of conflicting memories and antagonistic historical symbols” (p. 250).

The Ukrainian public discourse on identity can be divided into two main discourses: *post-colonial* and *post-imperial*, as it was previously discussed by Polegkyi (2015a, 2015b). The first discourse - is characterized by a victimization of the past and the demonization of the image of Russia (or USSR) which is perceived as an Empire, the second discourse – by the nostalgia for the lost glory of a great country until 1991, and hopes for the revival of unity with Russia. The post-imperial discourse very often represented by the narratives of ‘Slavic brotherhood’, discourse of ‘Great country’ and ‘Russian world’.

Theoretical background

The discursive construction of identity and its social representation has received much attention in social and political sciences last decades. Perhaps the most appropriate to this study perspective, that provides a very basic way of thinking about identity, is social constructivism - the assumption that identity is neither a given nor a fixed.

In short, identity is socially constructed at several levels and one of the most important – through relationships to the dominant ideologies, widespread social practices and underlying power structures drawn together as discourse. “Both social and discourse practices frame, and in many ways define, the way individuals and groups present themselves to others, negotiate roles, and conceptualize themselves.” (De Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006, p. 14)

Identity is not something that we ‘have’, but something that emerges through interactional practices – including ways of using language – in contexts. “Since identity is continuously and constantly produced and reproduced, sketched and designed, and often co-constructed by ‘self’ and ‘other,’ we should strive to demonstrate how identities are (re)produced through language (and other media) and how they come into existence through social interaction” (De Fina, Schiffrin & Bamberg, 2006, p. 22). Identity conflicts depend upon particular issues for their substance, while issue conflicts such as language, relation to the past etc., depend on the identity discourse for their meaning.

Identities are always in the process of change, adaptation and construction, especially during the time of essential social and political changes. Rather than seeing national and cultural identities in Ukraine as fixed and objective, I will follow constructivist approach in defining them

as collective representations of political, social, and cultural boundaries, and thus not simply characteristics of the self, but also aspects of the societal practices of domination and resistance. One of the important aspects concern the fact that identity may be seen in terms of multiplicity, so we should speak of not ‘one’ static identity, but rather ‘identities’ which can combine and interrelate. Sometimes these identities overlap without any essential conflict, in other cases, they struggle with one another.

The process of self-definition that leads to the sense of affiliation with a certain group and society is in many ways the key to national identity. But self-definition is always include the distinction of the image of ‘self’ and ‘others’. In this respect we should keep in mind the Benedict Anderson`s (1983) claim that a nation is an imagined community. He argued that identities are constructed though imagining, which enables individuals to see themselves as part of an invisible cultural whole. Imagining becomes a necessary precondition for obtaining national membership; he stressed the importance of myth, belief and self-image in the formation of group identity. Nations are imagined through language, which is why the language issue is so important in the Ukrainian case. Anderson also stressed the power of symbols – they create a strong sense of unity within a given community. Having discussed the importance of symbols, we should also mention the role of the past and the historical narratives of a given ethnic group. But nations are always imagined through the concrete social and cultural practices of their given societies.

To understand the meanings and functions of identity in certain societies we should distinguish between *cultural*, *ethnic* and *national* identities.

Ethnic identity refers to ethnicity as a base for an individual self-identification. Very often belonging to an ethnic group is also a matter of attitude, perceptions and emotions that are fleeting and changeable. In the words of Anthony Smith (1991), it allows to use ethnicity “‘instrumentally’ to further individual or collective interests, particularly of competing elites who need to mobilize large populations to support their goals in the struggle for power” (p. 20).

National identity is a type of shared identity that based on the belonging to the same nation. Anthony Smith (1991) states that “national identity” and “nation” are complex constructs, signifying a cultural and political bond, uniting in a single political community all who share a historic culture and homeland, and “drawn on elements of other kinds of collective identity, which explains how national identity can be combined with other types of identity, such as class, religious

or ethnic identity” (p. 14). Very often national identity can refer to either an ethnic or civic (political) community.

Smith (1991) identifies five fundamental features of national identity as a collective phenomenon, it is shared “historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mainstream public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members” (p. 14). He emphasizes that national identity can oppose other kinds of collective cultural identifications, and that a national identity is fundamentally multidimensional and “can never be reduced to a single element, even by particular factions of nationalists, nor can it be easily or swiftly induced in a population by artificial means” (Smith, 1991, p. 14). So we can conclude, national identity involves existence of a political community, some shared social institutions, common social practices, rights and duties.

According to Stuart Hall (1990), a nation is constructed and established in the discourse, mainly by the common narratives of national culture and history. Hall argues that identity is affected by history and culture, which are continually in the process of ongoing production. Hall also believes that our cultural identities “reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history.” (Hall, 1990, p. 223) That is why historical memories, which can be based on actual historical events or relevant myths, are important for strengthening national identity.

Post-colonial legacy

The idea of applying a postcolonial perspective to the countries of former Soviet Union may seem controversial. The applicability of the post-colonial analytical apparatus to this region was also discussed and resolved in different ways. Graham Smith (1998) addresses issues of post-colonialism in relation to what he calls “borderland identities”. For him, to take the meaning of ‘post-colonial’ is to assume that the post-Soviet states “were once subjects of a colonial project, part of an empire-driven political formation named the Soviet Union” (Smith, 1998, p. 8). David Moore also proposed applying postcolonial ideas to the region of Central and Eastern Europe, based at least on two points: “first, how extraordinarily postcolonial the societies of the former Soviet regions are, and, second, how extraordinarily little attention is paid to this fact, at least in these terms” (Moore, 2001, p. 114).

Taras Kuzio (2002) argues that the imperial policies applied by the imperial centre in the Soviet Union, were quite similar in nature to those imposed by the imperial powers in many other colonial countries. Consequently the national and state-building policies of the post-Soviet countries are similar to many other post-colonial states because they also seek to remove the inherited colonial legacies. Among the results of the subaltern status of Ukraine which are strongly influenced reconstruction of national identity was a gradual acceptance by the dominated population of the interpretations and main narratives offered by its colonial rulers. Kuzio supposes that Ukraine share many features similar to the other colonial examples. “Internal colonialism required persistent inequalities, economic dependency, a lower standard of living, a cultural division of labor and a reactive nationalism.” (Kuzio, 1998, p. 19)

Many in Russia still deny existence of Ukrainians as a separate nation. It is wide spread narratives that Ukraine never exists as a state, the Ukrainian language is a kind of ‘joke’ dialect of Russian, Ukrainians are a 'non-historical nation' and it was ‘invented’ in the beginning of XX-th century by Habsburg Empire to destroy Russian Empire. Independence provided ground for the development of Ukrainian language and culture, but does not eliminate the dominance of Russian language, media and culture in many spheres. As Mykola Riabchuk (2012) wrote “it did not liberate it from the inertial power of the imperial discourse and did not annihilate its ability of self-preservation and self-recreation with the help of neo-colonist practices and institutions.” In fact, he continued, “we are dealing with deep social deformations caused by long-term colonial domination” (p. 23).

In any case an analysis of post-imperial and post-colonial elements in Ukrainian discussion about identity can provide us a useful analytical framework to understand the Soviet imperial legacy and specifics of nation building in such countries in post-Soviet era. We can consider *post-coloniality*, as a discursive construct, “a set of subjective judgments bound up with the very constitutive nature and meaning of national identity” (Smith, 1998, 8). In post-colonial discourse, the image of the ‘empire’ is identical to the image of ‘the other’, what can be demonstrated by the frequent use of the term ‘empire’ in Ukrainian nationalist discourse. The image of the ‘empire’ as ‘the other’ plays an extremely important role in creating the image of the ‘self’. The positioning of the ‘self’ in relation to ‘Russia as Empire’ as well as ‘Europe’ as its opposition is the key for understanding today’s post-colonial narratives in Ukraine.

Past and the struggle for historical narratives

The interpretation of the Ukrainian relationship with past, Russia, post-colonial experience and Soviet legacy remains crucial to the nation-building process in Ukraine. In the post-communist countries politics of history still remain a crucial battle field for competing narratives of the past with political and ideological purpose. As a result, history and the past are used as an instrument for achieving political goals and strongly influence identity issues.

Russia used its compatriots' policy and historical narratives as a way to justify the occupation of Crimea and support for pro-Russian separatists in Donbass. The Russian propaganda actively used the Soviet mythology and narratives of the Cold war to frame the current events in Ukraine (Polegkyi, 2016b). Both sides use and abuse history as a political weapon, and the controversies about the heritage of Kievan Rus', the interpretation of WWII are not only academic, but also political issues (Osipian, 2015, p.113). In Ukraine conflicting meanings and different interpretations of WWII also contribute to a political conflict which splits Ukrainian society.

The Soviet Union's victory in WWII became a central tenet of Russian national identity building process especially under rules of Putin, according to Lev Gudkov (2005). The heritage of victory in 1945 is used by Moscow to continue to represent Russia as a great power and claim a special position and role in Europe. The "defence" of the national past is seen as the foundation of national cohesion. Important part of Russian foreign policy towards Ukraine is concerned with affecting very specific discursive elements, for instance by trying to manipulate the narratives and interpretation of WWII in one ideologically 'proper' way. Any challenge to the myth of victory amounts as an attack on Russia and a rivalry of Russian hegemony in post-Soviet space. In this case, any attempt of neighbouring countries look at their history from their own perspective, can be presented as an attempt to revise the results of World War II, and even as a 'rise of neo-Nazism'.

The origins of many of Ukraine's present political and cultural divisions lie in the history. For most of its history Ukraine was divided between different empires. Over the last two centuries the country has been divided and ruled by two empires – Russian and Austro-Hungarian – with considerably different political and social culture. Serhii Plokhy (2008) supposes that Ukraine was a borderland over the course of its history, not only of different state formations, but even of different civilizational and cultural zones. "Centuries of borderland existence contributed to the fuzziness and fragmentation of Ukrainian identity. Borders were created and policed to divide

people, but the borderlands served as contact zones where economic transactions (legal and illegal) took place, loyalties were traded and identities negotiated.” (p. 288)

For many Ukrainians, especially elder generation, the Soviet past today exists in a nostalgic, romanticized version. Many people particularly in regions such as the Donbas, link their worsening economic situation to the collapse of the former USSR. Nostalgic memories simplified past that stands in opposition to a confusing or uncertain present. So, till now for many in Ukraine the Soviet mythology still plays decisive role in the perception of state, past, socio-political situation and determine their behaviour. If we will add also the significant presence of Russian media in Ukraine (and especially in the east and south) which are permanently reproduce romantic vision of Soviet time and translate nowadays Russian mythology – it can explain the Soviet and Russian sentiment among population in Ukraine.

According to the study conducted by the sociological group "Rating" (08.10.2015) in October 2015, 31% of respondents still regret the collapse of the Soviet Union, while more than half – not, and 14% are undecided. Dynamics shows that every year the number of Ukrainian who regret the collapse of the USSR reduces: in 2010 the figure was 46%, in 2013 - 41%, in 2014 - 33%, and in 2015 already only 31%. Almost half of the residents of the South - 49%, 39% in the East and 25% in the Centre regret for USSR. The older the respondents are and with lower level of education and income, the more they feel sorry for the USSR. There is also ethnic differences – the number of respondents who feel sorry for the Soviet Union among Russians two times higher than among ethnic Ukrainians.

Russians in Ukraine

Rogers Brubaker (1996) explains the rise of nationalism in post-Soviet countries after collapse of Soviet Union as a tensions between the “*nationalizing*” state, i.e. nation-building states, *national minorities* and their *external homeland*. He suggests that in such cases nationalism were not purely “ethnic”, that “new” states implement “nationalizing” discourse to homogenize their population under the titular nation defined in ethno-cultural terms and distinct from the state citizenry as a whole. In “nationalizing” states, minorities may feel that their identity is under threat and state policy is structured in favor of the ethnic majority. This may lead them to seek outside

support from the “homeland” state. His description of “nationalizing states” suggests that the political and cultural elites of such ethnically heterogeneous states “promote (to various degrees) the language, culture, demographic position, economic flourishing, or political hegemony of the nominally state-bearing nation” (Brubaker, 1996, p. 57).

This notion looks relevant to the situation of Russians in Ukraine to some extent, but it is not ‘exclusive’ Ukrainian situation, because almost all nations in Europe passed through some kind of “nationalizing” process at the certain moment of history.

Brubaker also claimed that the relations between the minorities and the states not only depend on the factors internal to the actors involved, but are also derived from external influences, exercised by the homeland states. In the context of former Soviet republics the influence of Russia was significant, especially in the light of Russian uses of its compatriot as a mean to influence domestic policy in newly independent states. The variant for nation-building based on the ethnic homogeneity was absolutely not possible in case of Ukraine from a beginning. In the situation of ethnic and language diversity of the country, the exclusive model of ‘ethnic’ state – had conflict potential and actually nobody in Ukraine perceived it as an appropriate model.

As Brubaker (1994) argues, a state becomes an “external national homeland” when its political elites decide that their compatriots on the ethnic basis living in other states are members of one and the same nation. They claim that these compatriots “belong” to the state, and assert that their condition must be monitored and their interests protected and promoted abroad by the “homeland” state.

For many years Russia uses the issue of Russian minorities, language issue and historical narratives as a way of exerting its power in post-Soviet area and as a way of protecting the geopolitical interests of the Russian Federation outside of its own territory. Coming from the needs to mobilize support of the Russian Diaspora beyond Russia it develops as an ideological background of Russian foreign policy. As a base of the “Russian world” Kremlin uses Russian language and culture, an Orthodox faith, and common historical memory.

Highly urbanized and *Russified* eastern and partly southern Ukraine had strong cultural and economic links with Russia. Many Russians in Ukraine are proud of their Russian culture and heritage, but claim that it is different from the Russian culture in Russia. So we can rather say that

identities in eastern and southern Ukraine is neither Ukrainian nor Russian, but ambivalent, multiple, and in evolution. Border identities are often defined as ‘situational ethnicities’, argue Kuzio (1998) and particular period of time may determine which of a person’s collective identities or multiple loyalties are promoted. “‘Situational ethnicity’ implies that identities are not fixed, but blurred, possibly in a state of flux, dependent upon prevailing economic and geopolitical circumstances” (p. 12). It means that individuals can commute between dominant identities, depends on situation, especially in the border regions and during periods of significant transformation (Kuzio, 1998, p. 148).

There are of course group of people and Russian origin, and Russian speakers who perceive the country as divided by regional differences and believe that Ukrainian nationalists are the ones who are increasing tension in the country. At the same time, according to the survey carried in March 2014 in all regions of Ukraine (including Crimea and Donbas) conducted by the International Republican Institute (2014), only 12% of population (Definitely yes - 5%, Rather yes – 7%), answered yes on the question “Do you feel that Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine are under pressure or threat because of their language?”.

In September, 2015 Kyiv International Institute of Sociology - KIIS (2015a) conducted all-Ukrainian poll (*survey was conducted in all regions of Ukraine except the AR of Crimea*) about discrimination in Ukraine. About the half of the population think that there is no discrimination in Ukraine. Depending on the kind of discrimination, 23-32% of the population think that there is almost no discrimination, 5-10% - which discrimination of these kinds slightly appears. Less than 9% of the population experienced discrimination last year. This survey is interesting because in Luhansk and Donetsk regions survey was conducted both on territories that are controlled by Ukraine and that are not. That is why it showed differences in Donbas compared to the other part of Ukraine or similar studies before war. But even in this case it was not recorded such huge role of national or language discrimination as it represent by Russian media. Kinds of discrimination that have significant differences are discrimination by region of origin (13%) – this percentage is three times bigger there than in other regions of Ukraine (4%), discrimination by language (10%) – this percentage is two times bigger there than in other regions (5%), and discrimination by nationality (9%) – this percentage is almost two times bigger there than in other regions (5%).

Language issue

The language issue was hot topic during all years of Ukrainian independence and is closely linked with a constructions of national identity. The importance of language issue in Ukraine are still defined by the historical legacy of Ukrainian suppressed position under imperial conditions (both Tsarists and Soviet). Durable ‘Russification’ of Ukrainian society during Soviet time create situation that Ukrainian language was marginalized and even after 1991 was in fact in the subordinate position.

Division of society is often drawn along the linguistic lines, but in Ukraine language doesn’t indicate ethnicity directly. Many people speak both Russian and Ukrainian, or mixtures of the two – ‘surzhyk’. Politicians all the time played the ‘language card’ for their political goals, emphasising the regional confrontation and the status of the Russian language. As Tatiana Zhurzhenko (2002) argues, “it is not language differences that create tensions and conflicts, but rather various political forces articulate these differences and formulate the positions of the language groups” (p. 13). As a consequences, it created additional tensions in society and provoked discourse of hostility and exclusion. Similarly Volodymyr Kulyk (2016) argue that disagreement on the content of national identity “had much to do with political elites’ effort to mobilise the respective constituencies for the defence of their alleged interests” (p. 593).

According to census data (State Statistics Committee of Ukraine, 2001) in 2001 was 67.5% of Ukrainian speaking population of Ukraine (64.7% in 1989) and 29.6% (32.8 % in 1989) of those whose mother tongue was Russian. Ukrainian ethnics were mainly Ukrainian speakers (but almost 15 % declared Russian as their mother tongue in 2001), while 96% of Russian ethnics declared Russian as their first or exclusive language (but on 3% less than in the 1989 census). At the same time, the linguistic identity of Ukrainian citizens does not always correlate with their cultural identity. Furthermore, a Ukrainian cultural or what is even more important political identity was reported by many Russian-speaking citizens.

The Euromaidan protests, where took part both Ukrainian and Russian speakers, showed that language issue itself is not a dividing line in Ukraine. According to the poll conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology (2014) among the participants of ‘Euromaidan’ protest (it refers to the name of Independence Square in Kiev - *Maidan*, where the main event occurs), more than half were Ukrainian speaking, as many as 27% spoke Russian and 18 % both. Similarly

the study of Bruce Etling (2014) suggests that Russian-speaking Ukrainians may be significantly more supportive of Ukraine's standoff against Russia and the pro-Russian 'separatists' in Donbas.

The majority of Ukrainian population does not consider that the Russian language should be recognized as the second official language of Ukraine. Supporters of this idea has decreased significantly from 27% in 2013 to 19% in 2015 according to KIIS (2015b). Even in the Eastern and Southern regions only half of the population suppose that the Russian language should recognize as the second official language among those who would vote in a hypothetical referendum concerning the status of Russian language. The rest of the population of these regions - 46%, considers that the Russian language should recognize as the second official language only in those areas where the majority of people speaks Russian.

Identity issues in the light of public opinion

If a referendum for the independence of Ukraine was held in August 2016 (KIIS 2016)¹, 87% of Ukrainians would vote in favour of the act of independence, which is close to the figure during the referendum held in 1991 (89%). At the same time, these results were considerably higher than those of public opinion polls held in 2006 and 2011 (in 2006, 70% were in favour of independence and 30% were against, while in 2011 – this figure was 67% and 33%, accordingly). The greatest changes if to compare 2016 to 2011 were in the southern and eastern regions of Ukraine. In 2016 in the southern regions 78.5% of the people would have voted for independence (in 2011 only 47%), while 21.5% would have voted against (53% in 2011). In the eastern regions 71.5% (49% in 2011) would have voted in favour of independence, while 28.5% (49% in 2011) - against.

At the same time the majority of citizens still does not consider Ukraine to be a truly independent state. In 2016 only 38% of citizens were firmly convinced of the true independence of Ukraine, while 49% of citizens had the reverse opinion. Over the entire years since 2001 (when

¹ Nationwide survey was held by the I. Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation together with the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology in August 2016. Polling was held in all Ukrainian oblasts with the exception of Crimea. Polling in the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts was conducted only on the territories controlled by Ukraine.

this issue was first raised) only in 2005 the majority of citizens considered Ukraine to be truly independent (49% versus 37%).

One of the main elements indicating the national self-identification is loyalty towards the Ukrainian state. Absolute majority of the respondents (64%) has answered to themselves the question “Who am I?” – citizen of Ukraine in 2014. 30% described themselves as citizens of their region, city, or village, 21% would say – own nationality, 17% perceived themselves simply “a human”, 8% consider themselves Europeans and the same amount would say their family role. 4% of surveyed describe themselves as Soviet people, the same number - a citizen of the world. 3% of the respondents would say their profession or religious identification.

According to results of the survey conducted by the sociological group "Rating" (2014) in July 2014, 86% of the respondents consider themselves as patriots of Ukraine - 50% distinctively identify themselves as patriots, another 36% - rather yes than no. Only 6% of surveyed don't consider themselves like patriots, 8% - undecided. Comparatively with 2010 year amount of people who consider themselves as patriots raised from 76% to 86% (in 2013 before 'Euromaidan revolution' it was 81%).

The idea of Europe plays an important role in Ukrainian political discourse and is a crucial for a definition of foreign policy preferences and construction of Ukrainian national identity. The topic of European integration was also debated issue, and reflects different vision of Ukrainians of further development of country. But support for the European integration among Ukrainians was uncertain during a years. According to opinion poll surveys, only since 2011 public support for the European integration has been prevailing over support for integration into the Eurasian Union. Public opinion (Haran & Zolkina, 2017) in general largely reflects the instability in Ukraine-EU relations, as well as the inconsistent European integration policy of the Ukrainian government and the lack of a coherent policy from the side of European Union. The growth of support for European integration radically increased in 2014 and 2015. As well as support of Ukrainians of membership in the NATO increased in 2014 and became a growing trend over the three years. But in 2016 we can observe some decline in the support of European integration.

According to a survey conducted by Sociological group "Rating" (19.06.2015) in June 2015, choosing the membership of Ukraine in only one international economic union, 51% of respondents consider that it should have been done with the European Union, 16% - with the

Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan, 14% - for the other option, and 20% - are undecided. Since September, 2014 the level of support for integration with the European Union decreased from 59 to 51%, while support for integration with the Customs Union was a same.

If the referendum about the entry of Ukraine into NATO was held in June 2015, 40% would vote for accession, 32% - against, 11% - would not vote, and 17% - are undecided. Since November, 2014 when the peak (51%) was recorded, a gradual decrease in support for Ukraine's accession to NATO recorded: from 46% in April 2015 to 40% in June, while the number of opponents of Ukraine's accession to NATO increased from 25 to 32%.

Fluid regionalism and the myth of two Ukraine

It is already a common view concerning regional dividing of Ukraine and widely spread vision that these regional differences are powerful dividing lines. But the main patterns of regional identification in the changing social and political situation do not a form map with clear cut borders but rather create a base for simplification and misunderstanding. We can find similar attitudes in quite distant Ukrainian regions and, on the other hand, very diverse practices, attitudes and values in regions that traditionally considered quite homogenic. Very often scholars who studied Ukrainian regionalism and its impact on political behaviour, foreign policy preferences and national identity building tend to overrate the importance of regions and ignore the constructive and discursive nature of regional identities and it's dynamic in time.

Moreover even sociological surveys and studies typically described public opinion attitudes based on the simple patterns - East, West, South, Central regions, but it is significant simplification that lacks accounting of principal differences inside geographically close regions. If we will analyse the specifics inside the regions we will find that we should reshape our perception of regions in Ukraine, especially after the 'Euromaidan Revolution'.

Certainly strong regional political divergence, based in historical and cultural differences, can create fault lines within one state. But it should be noted here, that there was no strong controversy based on ethnic origins itself in Ukraine during 25 years. Ukraine as well had no strong separatist movements during all years of independence. Only in Crimea, which was most ethnically Russian region and an important site of Russian strategic interest, was some degree of noticeable separatism, especially in 90-s.

Although the political attitudes of the populations of different regions differ, there are also differences not only between East and West, but also between many other Ukrainian regions. It does not mean that the preferred language or ethnicity directly determines national identity or even geopolitical choices. For instance as reported Democratic Initiatives Foundation (2011), young people of Donbas and Crimea, where generally a negative attitude towards EU membership prevailed, did not differ from their peers in other regions of Ukraine. Within the age group 18-29, we can observe in this region that support of EU membership is 51% (average for the same age group in Ukraine was 58%), while the percentage of non-supporters is 22% (same in all Ukrainian sample).

We should recognize the vagueness presented in such distinctions and the fact that these ideas may explain some nuances of Ukrainian situations as much as it may confuses and lead to misunderstanding. Traditional dividing Ukraine on 'West' and "East" symbolizes the two poles of Ukrainian existence and offers us a possibility to distinguish different discourses in Ukraine concerning national identity, relation to the past and foreign policy preferences. However, such dividing, definitely simplifies a much more complex reality with all specifics and nuances. The main problem is that nobody can define where one half of 'this' Ukraine ends and the other part - begins.

The principal mistake of this myth of 'two Ukraine' is that it equates language, political orientation and national and regional identity of all Ukrainian citizens. Of course there are some correlations between the preferred language, region of residence, electoral behaviour, and views on foreign policy. However, it does not mean that the dividing lines are as definite and unequivocal as the discourse of two Ukraine's would suggest.

I would prefer to stand alongside the later works of Riabchuk (2009), who also stressed that the main controversy in Ukraine is not about ethnicity or language, the main "controversy is primarily about values and about national identity as a value-based attitude toward the past and the future, toward "us" and "them," toward an entire way of life and thought, symbolic representation and mundane behavior" (p. 27).

Conclusion

The legacies of stateless existence and the large-scale linguistic and cultural “Russification” and “Sovietization” have strongly influenced post-Soviet Ukrainian nation-building. Despite some regional determinations of political behaviour the main dividing lines in Ukrainian society base not so on the regional differences, but mainly on the generational, social and, first of all, value (we can also call it worldview) differences. I could rather argue that, there are competitions between ‘Soviet’ mentality and values, which translate all typical Soviet and nowadays Russian narratives towards history, identity, foreign policy etc., and ‘Ukrainian’ with all its differences and contradictions. These two groups are using different discourses that we can labelled as ‘post-colonial’ and ‘post-imperial’. Traditionally, ‘pro-Ukrainian’ was mainly associated with nationalistic discourse on Ukrainian identity. However, it would be a wrong idea to interpret such discourse only in a ‘nationalistic’ way, because very often it includes the ‘European’ components in the searching of Ukrainian identity and goes beyond of ethnical limits. The inclusive model of nation building can be the base for a building of a united Ukrainian political community bound by common values, despite of language, ethnic, etc. differences.

The challenge for post-Soviet Ukraine from a beginning was building of the inclusive model of national identity based not on ethnic but on civic ground (Motyl, 1993). The exclusive variant, which is based on the linguistic, cultural and religious traditions of the titular nation only, had and has negative potential in Ukraine. In fact, during many years of independence in Ukraine prevailed inclusive model. May be even not because of Ukrainian political elite ideological choice, but because they were more interested in their own business interests then something else. Nationalist’s forces and especially extreme nationalists who claim for the ethnically defined titular nation as a base for state-building were rather marginal in Ukrainian politics and could not played decisive role. The situation after ‘Euromaidan revolution’ and Russian aggressions became much more complicated. War and armed conflict have always played important roles in the re-definition of national identities because they required national unity and mobilization, but at the same time they provoke deeper dividing line in the society and focus upon an image of enemy and distinct ‘other’. Consequently, the open Russian-Ukrainian struggle induced a rise of anti-Russian sentiment (mainly it directed towards Russian state and its proponents, not just ethnical ‘Russians’) and divide Ukrainian society on much stronger ground.

Acknowledgment:

Some part of this study is elaborated version of author's PhD thesis and was published in: Polegkyi, O. (2015) *The media and political discourse in post-communist Ukraine*. PhD thesis. Belgium: Antwerp/Wroclaw University; Polegkyi, O. (2015). Identities building in post-communist Ukraine: post-imperial vs post-colonial discourses. In Törnquist-Plewa, B., Bernsand, N., & Narvselius, E. (Eds.). *Beyond Transition? Memory and Identity Narratives in Eastern and Central Europe*. Lund University: CFE Conference Papers Series No 7, 169-191.

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