

## СЕКЦІЯ 3 СОЦІАЛЬНІ СТРУКТУРИ ТА СОЦІАЛЬНІ ВІДНОСИНИ

### SOCIAL CRISIS IN CONTEMPORARY UKRAINE. IN SEARCH OF A NEW NARRATIVE

### СОЦІАЛЬНА КРИЗА В СУЧАСНІЙ УКРАЇНІ. У ПОШУКАХ НОВОЇ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТІ

*The purpose of the article is to demonstrate that Ukraine, being a large country located between the EU and Russia, faces a vast number of challenges that are primarily based on the differences between the Ukrainian regions. There are several narratives of national identity that may lead to possible tensions between the people and make further development of the county more difficult. The article is relevant nowadays, because the Ukrainian situation is influencing international politics and stability and therefore requires more deep understanding. Further research of the contemporary narratives and developments that are being shaped in Ukraine requires sociological approach and analysis across the regions to provide reliable knowledge.*

**Key words:** *narratives of national identity, cross-regional differences, Ukrainization, decentralization.*

*Мета статті – продемонструвати, що Україна, будучи великою країною, розташованою між ЄС і Росією, стикається з величезною кількістю проблем, які в основному полягають у відмінностях між регіонами України. Є кілька типів національної ідентичності, які можуть привести до можливої напруженості між людьми й утруднити подальший розвиток територій. Зараз ця стаття актуальна, тому що ситуація в Україні впливає на*

*міжнародну політику й стабільність і вимагає більш глибокого розуміння. Подальше дослідження подій, які відбуваються в Україні, вимагає соціологічного підходу й аналізу для забезпечення надійних знань.*

**Ключові слова:** *нарративи національної ідентичності, міжрегіональні відмінності, українізація, децентралізація.*

*Цель статьи – продемонстрировать, что Украина, будучи большой страной, расположенной между ЕС и Россией, сталкивается с огромным количеством проблем, которые в основном заключаются в различиях между регионами Украины. Существует несколько видов национальной идентичности, которые могут привести к возможной напряженности между людьми и затруднить дальнейшее развитие территорий. Сейчас эта статья актуальна, потому что ситуация в Украине влияет на международную политику и стабильность и требует более глубокого понимания. Дальнейшее исследование современных событий, которые происходят в Украине, требует социологического подхода и анализа для обеспечения надежных знаний.*

**Ключевые слова:** *нарративы национальной идентичности, межрегиональные различия, украинизация, децентрализация.*

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The problems of identification and narration are not only for approachable people, but also for every society. It is important to be aware of the identity of the Ukrainians as an ethnic group. Who has a place on the map? The topic that has been taken up in article will concern national identification (narration). Selected issues are inspired by the urgent need for scientific analysis of integration, development, existence of Ukraine identification. This was identified as a change in regional, cultural, economic, political, and other identities. Now the state has been divided between east and west, pro-Ukrainian and pro-Soviets on “their” and “alien”. Identification in the opinion of theoreticians is a complex element, based on the process of identifying with certain values. **Identification (from *lac. Identificare*)** – social-psychological process of identifying a person with a social group or community that helps in the search for various social activities, the acquisition

of certain social roles, and status (Bilensky, 2006 p. 117).

On August 24, 2016 Ukraine celebrated its 25th anniversary of independence. Despite the fact that this country is very young, Ukrainians have existed as an ethnical group of people for many centuries. They lived on the territories that belonged to different countries at different times, including Russian Empire, Poland, Austro-Hungarian Empire, Hungary and Romania. Now Ukraine is one of the largest countries in Europe with area of 603,500 m<sup>2</sup> and population of approximately 42 million people. It would seem that a country which eventually received long-awaited independence would have responsibility to build a strong united society in order to protect its sovereignty, but in the 1990s it did not happen. In the 2000s it did not happen as well. On the contrary, Ukraine faced several political and economic crises that in turn caused the societal

crisis that continues to harm Ukraine and its people.

In 1993, Professor Volodymyr Lanoviy, who was Minister of Economy of Ukraine, wrote: "I am sick and tired of hearing political leaders say "We are just beginning, we are trying to learn how to steer Ukraine out of political crisis" (Lanoviy, 1993, p. 194). It turned out that this task became too complicated for him and other politicians. Instead of uniting the country by introducing a common narrative of national identity, several very different narratives started to emerge in the 1990s and now they stand on the way of peaceful and stable development of Ukraine.

At first, there were two major narratives – pro-Ukrainian and pro-Soviet (pro-Russian) narratives. As Lanoviy wrote in 1993, "in the West of Ukraine, the popularity of the national socialists is growing rapidly and the republicans are losing the confidence of the population. In the East of Ukraine, the authority and prestige of communism is on the rise" (Lanoviy, 1993, p. 194). It should not be surprising that such polarization of Ukrainian society took place very shortly after the country had declared independence. In the academic literature there have already been many studies that proved that sharp economic declines have negative influence on people's preferences for the existing economic and political system (De Haas et al., 2008, p. 94). In the early 1990s, economic crisis harshly hit Ukraine, because its economy lost valuable economic ties with Russia and other countries to which manufacturing enterprises exported their products. Additionally, planned economy had to be transformed into the market economy and it was not a simple task for Ukraine, which had been one of the key Soviet republics in terms of industrial production and agriculture. Some large mono-cities, especially in the east of Ukraine in Donbass region, were built in the Soviet times and were a vital nod of a complex production network. In the 1990s, they had to learn how to survive. Without a doubt, economic and social shocks must have had great impact on people's views and a lot of people wanted to have once again relative stability that there used to be in the USSR even in the 1980s during the volatile years of Perestroika.

In terms of Ukraine, it is of great interest to investigate further why people in different parts of Ukraine view similar economic and political problems differently and why there is no unity in the Ukrainian society despite the fact that majority of the people in Ukraine, which is equal to 77%, are ethnic Ukrainians. Some scholars write that not only economic problems, but also cultural differences may cause a conflict (Cited in De Haas et al., p.94). So it is worth focusing on whether western and eastern Ukraine has such sharp cultural differences that do not allow a large east-European country to develop further. In this

article, several key differences will be described and the most popular narratives of national identity will be presented. Statistical data from various sources and extensive literature review will show that regional differences play a much more important role in spreading the societal crisis in Ukraine than belonging to a certain ethnic group or speaking Ukrainian or Russian language. Finally, it will be suggested that ineffective Soviet meaning of power as well as power of several business groups during the first 20 years of Ukrainian independence were some of the major factors of fundamental societal crisis that later resulted in annexation of Crimea by Russia and military conflict in some parts of Donbass region on the border with Russia.

To start with, Karácsonyi et al. (2014) described a large number of differences between eastern and western Ukraine in the article ***East-West dichotomy and political conflict in Ukraine – Was Huntington right?***<sup>1</sup>. In authors' opinion, dichotomy was caused by ethnic and religious differences, level of urbanization, level of economic development, national identity, etc. These differences were being shaped for several centuries along the Uman'- Kharkiv line. For instance, in XIX-XX centuries Eastern Ukrainian regions went through the process of rapid industrialization that made them dependent on Russian economy. Uneven industrialization also led to the divide between urban and rural Ukraine. Karácsonyi et al. (2014) write that 65% of rural citizens live in the western part of Ukraine. On the contrary, almost 80% of the population lives in the cities in the east of Ukraine. (Karácsonyi et al., 2014, p.120). Once again, this is because settlements in the east are not as old as settlements in the west of the country. For example, large cities in the east of Ukraine were founded as follows: Kharkiv – 1650, Donetsk – 1869, Luhansk – 1795, Odessa – 1794, Dnepropetrovsk – 1776. As for major cities in the west of Ukraine: Lviv – 1240, Ivano-Frankovsk – 1650, Ternopol – 1540, Chernivtsi – 1408. The same trend is concerned with smaller towns. If in the eastern part of Ukraine many mono-cities were built during the period of industrialization, the settlement network in the west of Ukraine was formed in the course of several centuries that preceded industrialization (Karácsonyi et al., 2014, p. 120).

When Ukraine was united under the rule of the Soviet Union, there were common centralized policies, but they did not erase regional differences. Moreover, some policies, for example migration policies, led to rebalancing of ethnical groups in Ukrainian cities. In Eastern Ukraine, the number of people of Russian origin significantly increased, because a lot of workers were coming to eastern Ukrainian cities in order to build new factories and plants. Moreover, a large number of Ukrainians died during Holodomor and the World

War II or was made to migrate to other countries. In western Ukraine, there were also significant migrations. After the World War II, ethnic Poles had to move to Poland and ethnic Ukrainians that lived in Poland moved back to Ukraine. For example, in Lviv in 1939 50% of population was Polish people and only 15% of population was Ukrainians (Mick, 2011, p. 2). During the World War II the city quickly became a vital cultural, historic and industrial center for Ukrainians. Additionally, the USSR was trying to integrate Lviv and other western Ukrainian cities into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. After several decades, 88% of the population in Lviv were Ukrainians, 9% were Russians, and only 1% was Polish people (Ukrainian Census of 2001).

The most visible cultural differences in Ukraine are language and religion. According to the Ukrainian Census of 2001, 14.8% of ethnic Ukrainians think that Russian is their native language. Based on the information about migration provided above, it is not surprising at all that the number of ethnic Ukrainians who speak Russian is significantly higher in the eastern regions of Ukraine. Up to 60% of ethnic Ukrainians in Donetsk, Luhansk and Crimea think that Russian is their native language (Cited in Karácsonyi et al., 2014, p. 115). In general, Ukrainian language has state status and is protected by the Ukrainian Constitution that was passed in 1996. Other languages, in particular Russian, Crimean Tatar, Polish, Hungarian, Romanian languages are used for communication by ethnic minorities that live in different parts of Ukraine. Without a doubt, Russian language is the most widely-spread. Very often the topic of oppression of the Russian-speaking Ukrainians and ethnic Russians is used by some local politicians as well as by Russian government in order to get political mileage in Ukraine and abroad.

In terms of religion, there are much more believers in the western regions than in the eastern regions – 86.6% vs. 50.5%. Such a difference may be explained by the fact that the Soviet Union was not so aggressive in the western Ukraine that joined the USSR only after the World War II (Karácsonyi et al., 2014, p. 115). Additionally, there are more Catholic people in the West than in the East. Finally, for understanding the divide in the Ukrainian society by religion it is important to mention that there are two competing Orthodox Churches in Ukraine. There are churches that belong either to the

Kyiv Patriarchate or the Moscow Patriarchate. According to the official data provided by the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, two thirds of Orthodox churches belong to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate). In turn, there are twice as few churches that belong to the Kyiv Patriarchate (Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, 2016). Paradoxically, majority of Orthodox people in Ukraine support the Kyiv Patriarchate (Razumkov Center, 2016).

Discrepancy in the number of churches may have been caused by two factors. The Kyiv Patriarchate was established in 1992 and it is unrecognized by the canonical Orthodox churches at the international level. Thus, it is difficult to create an extensive network of churches around the country even though there is the public will. Secondly, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate has very strong support from the Russian Orthodox Church and influential pro-Russian Ukrainian politicians. There have been appeals in Ukraine initiated by pro-western Presidents Viktor Yushchenko and Petro Poroshenko to create a unified Ukrainian Church, but it seems that at the moment this idea is not feasible due to evident absence of consensus between two dominating churches.

One more important difference lies in how Ukrainians in different parts of the country view democracy and free market economy. People who live in the east of Ukraine are 35% less likely to support a market-based economic system and 42% less likely to be in favor of democracy (De Haas et al., 2015, p.93). What is more, negative views concerning democracy and market economy grew up in the east of Ukraine in 2006–2010 due to the economic crisis that Ukraine had to overcome (De Haas et al., 2015, p.93). In the 2000s, economic situation did not significantly improve, mainly because “institutionalized oligarchic capital and clannish power” took hold and society became divided into the super wealthy and the poor” (Kuzio, 2011, p. 95). Moreover, Ukraine continued to rest on conservative Soviet governance structures and ideologies that did not allow active participation of citizens in national and regional politics (Korostelina, 2013, p. 39). Both power of oligarchs and Soviet ideology are much stronger in the east of Ukraine, where a lot of large industrial companies are located. Due to the inconsistencies in the economic system and political governance model, it is not surprising that people in the east of Ukraine, in particular in Donbas region, are more dissatisfied with the national government and therefore would like to have closer ties with Russia in order to reconstruct the past when cities in Soviet Ukraine were benefiting from central planning and extensive economic cooperation with Russia.

Information that was provided above shows that Ukrainian society is indeed diverse and there are

<sup>1</sup> **S.H. Huntington Identity** – it belongs to both the person and the group. People themselves build by their own will or it results from their life. A person and a group can have many identities such as economic, cultural, political, social, territorial, local and other. Each one is valuable to the group. It should be understood that each identity shapes different factors such as: a) **Askrepension** (age, sex, ethnicity, race); b) **Cultural** (language, traditions, religions); c) **Territory** (town, town, region); d) **Politics** (ideology, public interest, loyalty to the leader); e) **economic**; f) **Social**. Some of them I would like to describe and analyze in your article.

regional differences that may have negative impact on the current development of the country. For example, in 2014, after the end of Euromaidan and escape of President of Ukraine Victor Yanukovich to Russia, Russia was relying on a narrative of oppression of Russian coethnics in the east of Ukraine and Crimea (Metzger et al., 2016, p. 21). Interestingly, that during the Euromaidan the narrative was different and was concerned with the question whether Ukraine should be integrating into the EU or not. Yuri Zhukov from University of Michigan states that it would be wrong to “associate terms like ‘pro-Russian’ and “pro-Ukrainian” only with the ethnic and linguistic groups that bear their name” (Zhukov, 2015, p. 2). He provides an example of the region of Donbas where rebels look in the direction of Russia not because of their ethnicity or language. In his opinion, maintaining close trade ties with Russia is one of the main factors why some people in Donbass are acting against Ukrainian government (Zhukov, 2015, p. 2). Barrington and Herron (2004) also think that very different ethnic groups in Ukraine can coexist peacefully and call the phenomenon as “the dogs that didn’t bark” phenomenon (Barrington & Herron, 2004, p.4).

However, there might be doubts if this phenomenon could be observed in Ukraine starting from 2004 after the end of the Orange Revolution that brought a pro-western politician Victor Yushchenko to power. There were no direct conflicts between people until 2014, but tension in the political circles was rising. President Yushchenko was probably the first president in independent Ukraine that tried to deconstruct Soviet mentality. He raised the topic of Holodomor as a Holocaust and the WWII in which Ukraine suffered not only from the Nazi Germany, but also from the USSR. However, President Yushchenko quickly lost his popularity due to the political crisis. In the next elections a pro-Russian politician Viktor Yanukovich became President of Ukraine. Under his rule, there was a very sharp return to the facet democracy and further weakening of Ukrainian economy as well as the whole political system (Korostelina, 2013, p. 41).

The shift between ideologies in Ukraine may be explained by presence of very different narratives of national identity. Korostelina (n. d.) provides five types of narratives of national identity: a dual identity; being pro-Soviet; a fight for Ukrainian identity; recognition of Ukrainian identity; a multicultural-civic narrative; and a Crimean Tatars’ narrative (Korostelina, n. d., p. 2). Each narrative has a very strong logical basis and may contradict other narratives. Therefore, one narrative cannot be dominating in Ukraine. In addition, a compromise between some narratives is difficult if not impossible to achieve.

Korostelina (n. d.) writes that the dual identity narrative is applied to describe Ukraine as a state

“with a dual identity of two equal ethnic groups” (Korostelina, n. d., p. 7). People who support this narrative may be proud of Russian heritage and think that it is the nationalists who caused tension in the Ukrainian society. In their opinion, regions have very different histories and therefore it is difficult to develop a common national identity (Korostelina, n. d., p. 7). People who support the pro-Soviet narrative would like to change the overall opinion about the USSR and recognize both positive and negative parts of the Soviet past. They think that Ukraine should develop a multicultural society and avoid one-sided interpretation of history (Korostelina, n. d., p. 7). The “Fight for Ukrainian identity” narrative is based on the idea that Ukraine has “a post-colonial, post-genocidal society that was able to survive, preserve culture and language, and achieve independence” (Korostelina, n. d., p. 7). Those people who support this narrative think that the country is facing a threat from the pro-Soviet or pro-Russian population and politicians that are supported by Russia. For them it is important to protect Ukrainian democratic values and edge pro-Soviet totalitarian ideals (Korostelina, n. d., p. 8). The “Recognition of Ukrainian identity” narrative describes Ukraine as a country in which society should be united by democratic Ukrainian culture as a substitute of the Soviet totalitarian regime. Following this narrative, tensions in Ukrainian society were caused by manipulations initiated by Russia and do not have the real basis. Therefore, Ukraine should protect itself from Russian influence in all spheres of life (Korostelina, n. d., p. 8). The multicultural civic narrative is based on the idea that Ukrainian society should have a civic meaning of national identity and “reflect multiple voices of Ukrainian history” (Korostelina, n. d., p. 8). Finally, the narrative of Crimean Tatars supports Ukrainian independence. People with this narrative think that pro-Russian forces divided Ukraine. Moreover, they think that Ukrainians should be more positive towards the ethnic group of Crimean Tatars (Korostelina, n. d., p. 8).

What could be possible scenarios for Ukraine based on the narratives provided above? Andrew Wilson from the University College in London thinks that rapid Ukrainization will probably not occur in Ukraine, because there is quite a large group of people – up to 30–35% of the total population – who consider themselves as Russian speaking ethnical Ukrainians (Cited in Popson, 2011). These people are very diverse and may have different views about Ukrainian culture, history, economic and political prospects. Starting from 2014, one can observe that some people in this group who live in Donbass support rebels that fight against Ukraine. Wilson suggests three main scenarios for Ukraine: a state that is like Canada “with own Russophone or Ukrainian Quebec”, gradual Ukrainization and consolidation of society or continuation of conflict

between overlapping identities (Cited in Popson, 2011).

However, no matter what a scenario for Ukraine will be, it is important for the government to implement reforms in all spheres in order to resolve accumulated problems and prevent development of a failed state. International organizations and foreign governments assist Ukraine in reforms. One of the reforms that are likely to reduce tension in Ukraine is a so-called decentralization reform. There are two main aims of this reform: to improve governance and budgeting at the local level and shift responsibility from the national level to the local level. Additionally, decentralization is an alternative to federalization that was promoted by Russia during the peace talks that were concerned with the situation in Donbass region. Ukraine is using the model that was applied by Poland in the 1990s. If the decentralization reform is implemented as it has been planned, the risk of potential conflict between regions and center will be low.

**Conclusion.** Formation of a united prosperous country is always incredibly complex and depends on many factors. In terms of Ukraine, it turned out that the country unlike the countries of Central and Eastern Europe failed to cope with the economic crisis and formation of the new governance system that would not rely on the Soviet meaning of power. Additionally, the issue of national identity became one of the most debatable topics in Ukraine. There are very different narratives that for many years peacefully co-existed. “The dogs that didn’t bark” phenomenon ended in 2004 when the Orange revolution started. Since then it is has been clear that people can be divided not only by the issue “Pro-European” or “Pro-Russian”. There are much more complex issues that may divide people. Some historical issues, including the role of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army in Ukrainian history or positive and negative sides of the Soviet Ukraine are the topics that do not bring consensus in the Ukrainian society. What is more, there are several regional differences that include language, religion, level of urbanization, ethnicity, and opinions about market or planned economies, which make creation of a common narrative of national identity a difficult task.

Nevertheless, one could observe the will of Ukrainian people to fight for their country in 2014 when Crimea was annexed by Russia. At the moment, Ukrainian government as well as the civil society has support from international partners and therefore there are structural reforms and public discussions that help to raise controversial issues that were suppressed for many years. It is not clear yet which scenario Ukraine will choose for staying united. It is likely that Ukraine will continue its gradual Ukrainization and balancing interests of different regions by means of decentralization that has already started and will last for several years until the conflict in Donbass region is resolved. Now there is common understanding in Ukraine

that it is important to avoid becoming a failed state and therefore a lot of hurting transformations have to take place. To sum up, the way how people and government will view history, culture and diversity in the Ukrainian society will define the future scenario of development of Ukraine.

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