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"Eastern Europe/NIS as European states: to the question of constructing identity"

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This paper is dedicated to the very complicated problem in the development of the societies of the newly independent states in the east Europe – to the question about the constructing of national identity. For these states this problem is connected with historical past and modern political stereotypes, myths and symbols.

The theme covers the problem of identity from the point of political constructivism, based on comparative analyze of political tendencies and socio-demographic data.

Key words: Eastern Europe, New independent states, identity, national/state-oriented identity.

When we use the term "identity" often we are speaking about different and depend of its sense from the context. In the international relations we can determine at minimum such aspects and levels: individual (considering the accruing role of individuals in modern international system); several ethnic, social, political etc. groups (depend on their role and influence in the policy-making process); regional/sub-regional level; national and supranational level.

During last decades political science has faced with fundamental questions, which established due to transformation processes in the former soviet republics, nowadays - states of the eastern or common partnership. Globalization, an open information space, developing of the network's counteractions, high mobility and immigration, interaction of the cultures change essentially not only the vision of the state as an social and political institution, but also the perception of the population and the term of the "statehood". In this context the category of identity becomes very fluently.

In modern political circles of the NIS the question about the national/state identity is discussing not very often, generally speaking, only during the elections. The problems about the content, forms, instruments and aims of the constructing identity, in particular politics and policy of identity are in the focus only of the scientific and cultural spheres. At the same time the state must be interesting in elaboration and realization of the systematic policy of identity through different channels (mass-media, education, culture etc.), ritual, ceremonial and everyday practice.

It's necessary to define the term "identity", especially when we are talking about national identity. Sometimes we have difficulties with definitions through the semantic base of different languages, for example, the word "national" is used in English as synonym and notional adjective from the word "state", but in Russian and Ukrainian languages there are deferent adjectives – "gosudarstvennaya" and "nazionalnaya" (in Russian) and "derjavna" and "nazionalna" (ukr.). The first one has relation to the state as social construction, and the second one – to the nation.

Especially this question is important for the countries of the Eastern Europe, because for them the question of identity means the choice of the modernization model, model of the statehood and the common fundamental question about their civilizational accessory.

The national/state-oriented identity is an important element of political system: through this mechanism people are integrating into the civil structures (also in state as an social structure); it offers the continuation of the policy; I determines the behaviors of the people, which are liable for the decision-making and constructing of the legislative and axiological sphere; it's mechanism of mobilization for some political actions and determination of the trends of policy; it makes the society more stable. In general, national /state-oriented identity is keeping integrity of the national states and constructing their relations with other states.

For the countries of the East Europe there are some key problems connected with question of their identity-building:

-       Correlation of the national and state-oriented identities. This problem exists not only in the post-soviet area, but also in many states which appeared during the last two-three decades. For these countries is very actual question about the history and state-building traditions. Here we can notice big difference between countries of Eastern Central Europe and Baltics from one side and Western new independent state – from another. In case of the Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine and Russia the national identity existed for a long time, but the state-oriented identity is in the process. Often there are a lot of arguments demonstrate a lack of state policy in this context, what creates backgrounds for big skepticism towards the perception of these states as sovereign independent actors on international arena.

As we discussed, ethnical structure of NIS' societies is heterogeneous, but the percentage of the major nation is demonstrative. According to the 2010 census, ethnic Russians make up 81% of the total population, while six other ethnicities have a population exceeding 1 million – Tatars (3.9%), Ukrainians (1.4%), Bashkir (1.1%), Chuvash (1%), Chechens (1%) and Armenians (0.9%). In total, 160 different ethnic groups and indigenous peoples live within the Russian Federation's borders. In Ukraine there is also complicated situation: Ukrainian 77.8%, Russian 17.3%, Romanian 0.8% (including Moldovan 0.5%), Belarusian 0.6%, Crimean Tatar 0.5%, Bulgarian 0.4%, Hungarian 0.3%, Polish 0.3%, Jewish 0.2%, Greeks 0.2% and other 1.6% (including Muslim Bulgarians, otherwise known as Torbesh, old communities of Armenians living on the Sea of Azov, and a microcosm of Gotlander Swedes of Gammalsvenskby)[i]. In Moldova and Belarus there is another situation, here the population more homogenous, but some difficulties are also present.

In this context there is very interesting data, which operates T.Kuzio[ii]: 27% of Ukrainian citizens' identity themselves as both Ukrainian and Russian.

Such situation is leading to the problem of the interaction between national majority and minorities, also these relations are much politicized. As an example, we can use the situation around the legislative regulation of the status of the minorities and regional languages in Ukraine. From the sphere of the defense of cultural rights it was transformed to the sphere of the minority's rights. Based on the law "about the grounds of language's politics" some regional institutions created and pronounced the special status for "regional" languages. The Ukrainian legislative guarantees now the defense and countenance of the languages of national minorities (not the languages, which are disappearing), but there is no law, which approves the usage und development of the Ukrainian language.

Adding to this, there is 30-35% from Ukrainian people, who consider themselves ethnically Ukrainian, but whose language of preference is Russian. So offers the conclusion that the political instruments are using for the dissolution of the national identity of the majority and strengthening of the interrelation with the neighbor state – Russia.

- Correspondence of the national identity and citizenship.It's a question of the institutional and legal frameworks for the national/state-oriented identity. For this region of the international relations the problem of citizenship has a principal character in situations of the "frozen" conflicts. For example, near 30% of the population of Transnistria has Russian citizenship and another 25-27% - Ukrainian Here we have difficult and complicated case, because Moldavian soviet republic was created on base of the autonomic republic on the territory of the Ukrainian soviet republic and population of these regions were ethnically Slavonic. In time of creation of the new Moldavian state in the framework of exiting international law became sharp the conflict of the national identity and citizenship in this territory, and all these have the international consequences, particular due to influence of the external actors. Moldovans are the largest ethnic group in Moldova. According to the combined data of the census in the government controlled area and the census in Transnistria in 2004 they account for 69.6% of the country's population. The proportion of Ukrainians and Russians decreased considerably in comparison to the last Soviet census in 1989: from 13.8% to 11.2% and from 13.0% to 9.4% respectively. This is mostly due to emigration. Ukrainians mostly live in the east (Transnitria) and the north, while Russians mostly live in urban areas: 27% of all Russians live in Chişinău, 18% live in Tiraspol, 11% in Bender and 6% in Bălţi. The Gagauz people are the fourth-largest ethnic group (3.8% in 2004). Most of them live in the south of Moldova in the autonomous region of Gagauzia.

Another aspect of this problem is a question about the dual citizenship and presence and activity population with citizenship of the neighbor states.

- Interaction and overlapping of the different levels of political identities. Competition of the different identities: state-oriented, national, religious, ethnical, confessional etc. This trend is a result of the interaction of the previous positions. In poly-ethnical societies there is possible the conflict of the parallel - existing identities.

- External influences and competition of the leading regional and global actors, in particular, in the sphere of constructing of the national identity. In this passage we need to remind about the geopolitical place of the region. More concrete its characteristics will be analyzed below.

- Destatization(deetatization) and the national and state-oriented identity constructing process. It is the global tendency in international relations and must be investigated as a separate subject.

Considering that the national/state-oriented identity building is in process in the western new independent states, the question about the grounds for its creation and development arises: do the must be political, but also non-political? In this context under the term "political" we mean factors connected with the statehood, its institutions and symbols, and "non-political" – cultural, religious or ethnical universals.

Political grounds are:
- Political principles and values
- Loyalty to the political institutions
- Positive historical memory and historical myths
- Political "symbols"
- Positive consequences of the internal and international policy. Political and economic success

When we are talking about political values for the analyze of existing situation can be used the data of such NGO as Freedom House, which provides for the 27 post-communist transition countries additional rankings which focus on different aspects of the political and economic transition.

The democratization score is an average on sub scores concerning the political process, civic society, independent media and governance and public administration. The rule of law score consists of assessments about the constitutional, legislative, and judicial framework as well as on the degree of corruption in a country.

The research of the democratization and the freedom of the mass-media provided by the Freedom House demonstrates very specific situation in these countries: Azerbaijan, Belarus and Russia were named as "not free", at the same time Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were described as "partly free". Especially this criteria is necessary when we are talking about the goal of their foreign policy – integration to the EU's structures and common European values.

Summarizing the findings of the macro-analysis, there are some systematic differences between countries with higher levels of national identity and those with lower levels. However, the patterns are distorted by many exceptions. The only explanatory factors that seem to work quite well are ethno-cultural heterogeneity and success in the economic transition process. In countries with significant ethnic minorities national identification is much lower than in ethnically homogeneous countries. This applies particularly to countries where the relations between the ethnic majority and ethnic minorities are contentious.

Economic performance also seems to explain why the strength of national identity varies between countries.

Non-political grounds: national character, feeling of the motherland and common origin etc. In addition to this language and national pride, also homogeneity of the structure promotes the creation of the national/state–oriented identity. In the heterogeneous structures it's more complicated to form it.

National identity can be analyzed from two perspectives: looking at the intensity of identification which can be described as the strength of national identity and looking at the sources of identification which can be called the content of identity.

Studies on nationalism have pointed out that national identity can have different sources: common myths and historical memories, a common a mass, public culture, and common political goals. Sources of national identity can thus be related to political as well as to non-political aspects of a nation.

The indicators can differentiate political sources and nonpolitical sources of national pride. As it was earlier noted, indicators for political pride focus on 1) democratic achievements (pride in way democracy works, pride in fair treatment of other groups), 2) socio-economic achievements (pride in country's social security system, pride in country's economic achievements), 3) international achievements (pride in country's political influence in the world), and 4) pride in country's armed forces. The non-political sources are measured by pride in a country's history, achievements in arts and literature, in sports and in science.

Looking at the distribution of specific pride, pride in political and economic achievements is in all seven countries very low. In all countries only a minority of respondents is proud or very proud in its country's political or economic achievements. Notwithstanding the variation between countries, specific pride is lowest concerning the achievements of the social security system and economic achievements. Given the severe cuts to the former socialist welfare systems as well as the economic hardships after the introduction of a market based economy, these results are not surprising. The level of pride in the performance of the democracy is also very low.

At the same time pride in non-political achievements of the nation is in all countries very high. The highest levels are found for pride in national history followed by pride in arts and literature, and pride in sports. In all countries between 70 and 90 percent of the population are proud or very proud of their country's history and the national achievements in arts, literature, and sports[iii]. With respect to scientific achievements, the results are much lower, however there are still broad majorities who are proud such as in Hungary, Slovenia, the Czech Republic and Poland. Regarding pride in the armed forces the findings are mixed.

Given the high levels of pride referring to non-political achievements and the low levels of pride in political and economic achievements, one can speculate that in these countries national identity is primarily based on non-political sources such as pride in history and culture. This would also explain why, despite the political and economic problems in all countries a broad majority still identifies with their nation.

So, national identity is in a greater lesser degree a construct, notably, predominantly discursive and depends on the context. There are some models of the correlation between the national identity and policy (politics) of identity:

-Strong government-operated policy of identity and strong identity. For such model the state needs often to have a long history of the state-building and strong national, not only state-oriented, identity/ as an example we are talking about France or Germany. But it doesn't mean that there are no problems of the correlation/competition of the different identities (regional and national, for example).

-Strong government-operated policy of identity and poor identity. Such situation has place in the states with pluralistically ethnical, cultural, languages and social structure. For example, the situation around the concept of "multiculturalism" and its realization in countries of the European Union–de-facto this policy failed. Another example – attempts of the EU to turn the greater part of population to the European commonness, as a base for further integration.

-Poor government-operated policy of identity and strong identity. For such variation of the development of the identity must existed strong historical, cultural or religious common source and traditional perception of the state as the main value in society.

-Poor government-operated policy of identity and poor identity. This model exists in the countries, which are on the transformation. So, this example we can observe in the East Europe/NIS region.

Based on the experience and practice of the European Union can be determinate such instruments of constructing of identity:

-Economical. In the region the can mark different mechanisms of influence: the aid from the EU – TACIS program, activity of the EBRD, direct foreign investments. From another side Russian Federation provides a soft bank lending, activity of Russian financial corporations, also the measures of economic pressure – f.e., activity of the "Gazprom".

-Political-institutional. In the case of east European countries they can be – a membership in international organizations, or special programs of cooperation, f.e., European Neighborhood policy, eastern partnership or as a "symbol" a perspective of the membership in the EU; other side – as an alternative – cooperation within framework of international organizations with a leading role of Russia, such as EurAzEC etc.

-Cultural and civilizational: these instruments can be characterized as instruments for the realization of the "soft power" concept. For example, active cultural exchanges, educational programs, activity of the cultural and information centers, support of the language-policy etc.

East Europe is a good example, where we can illustrate and analyze these tendencies. East Europe as region of Europe can be characterized as dynamic category (different sense of the term in different historic periods); heterogeneous: ethnical, religious, political; different alternative values – from common European values of democracy and human rights to the prominent role of state and government in the civic structure (its more in Asian

traditions); common historical backgrounds and active competition of the two civilization (modalities): as heritage of Austrian-Hungarian and Russian Empires; different self-perception of the population of these states etc.

The collapse of the Soviet Union produced a number of new nation-states. The birth of new states is often accompanied by changes concerning territorial borders and citizenship. National identification is an emotional attachment to the (nation-)state and needs time to develop. Many of the newly independent states have had little time for this.

In these countries there has been much less continuity in the relation between nation and state than in older nation-states such as Poland and Hungary, maybe also Baltic states.Thus, it is plausible to assume that the level of national identity is lower in countries which gained independence just after the collapse of communism in the early nineties.

National identity varies between countries is the degree of ethnical or cultural diversity. Any collective identity needs some common core be it political, ethnic, linguistic, religious or cultural. Although nationality can be based just on the idea of citizenship and unite different ethnic or cultural groups nationality is typically also defined by a common ethnic or cultural origin. National identity in Central and Eastern Europe is often assumed to be largely based on ethnicity and culture[iv].

The larger the minority, the more they may lower the average of national identification. Thus one might expect higher levels of national identification in ethnically and culturally homogeneous countries and lower levels in ethnically diverse countries.

Given the relatively clear pattern concerning ethno-cultural heterogeneity in both country groups, ethno-cultural heterogeneity seems to have an inhibiting effect on national identity at the country level. Thus the hypothesis that national identity is stronger in ethno-culturally homogeneous countries than in countries that are ethno-culturally diverse is supported. Linguistic diversity was measured using the question which language is (predominantly) spoken at home.

Very important role in the constructing of national identity plays religion. In the was a period of ongoing social and cultural diversification and, at the same time, of a reactive hardening of the Soviet regime; it made the institutional framework increasingly at odds with the changing society, and finally these processes took the form of an exponential collapse of institutional structures. The institutional catastrophe in turn produced an identity crisis—not just a gradually evolving one but a rapid and painful turning point.

The overall identity crisis that developed during the course of this disintegration was essentially dominated by the energy of particularism; it was in fact a crisis of old collective values and symbols, a multiplication and split of identity frames, from cosmic communist and imperial supranational frames down to frames of ethnicity, social strata, locality, family, other immediate groups and the individual.

The post-Soviet nations were obviously exposed to this dramatic choice. The powerful matrix of a liberal democratic nation-state that had dominated the public mind, the mass media and official programs ever since Sakharov's and Gorbachev's interpretations of universal values (obshchechelovecheskietsennosti)[v] apparently contradicted the parallel process of rising ethno-nationalism found throughout the empire, and several conflicts (some of them violent) appeared to prove the general propensity toward primordial forms of cognitive and social frameworks.

Karl Deutsch (1966) argued that the 'nation' was a fluid process rather than a constant organic entity or a set of cultural 'givens'. It is quite remarkable that the 'organic approach' has become common to the nationalist way of thinking.. According to Deutsch, however, the core of this process is the ongoing development of communications, the expanding of the public sphere as the framework of an 'imagined community'[vi]. To a great extent, and paradoxically, it was Soviet imperial management that, while attempting to create a supra-ethnic space of multiculturalism, produced at the same time the general political, legal, institutional and cultural framework for contemporary ethno-national mapping and identities..

Consequently, as soon as religion became a part of the public discourse, religious identity became a source of political legitimation and mobilization. Although very few political movements have been religiously focused (and those that were not especially successful), the elements of religious charisma were widely used across the political spectrum in all former Soviet states, both by the ruling elites and the various opposition groups.

Finally, and most importantly, religious identity became, both on the private and public levels, an auxiliary source of ethnic and national consolidation. Ethnic identity was combined with state sovereignty to produce a new national identity. Religion was one of the latent (or active) components that first supported revived ethnicity and then moved up to the level of nation building as one of the major cultural boundary markers: for instance,the Roman Catholic identity of Lithuania, the Christian identity of Armenia (as opposed to its Muslim surroundings) , the Muslim identity of Tatars (in Christian-dominated Russia) or, to take a more complex case, the specifically mixed Christianity of Ukraine (as opposed to the Russian Orthodoxy of the former imperial center).

Speaking generally, the evolution in Russia was completely predictable: ethno-national identity is a necessary historical component of the process of 'nation', especially when it corresponds to a particular territorial frame. Thus, this process specifies the too simple distinction between empire-savers and nation-builders, for 'nation building' in all cases is by no means a pure 'civic' enterprise but contains a certain admixture of ethnic and cultural identities. With respect to religion, the growing ethnic awareness and the need for auxiliary identity sources revived the slogan of an 'Orthodox country'. As one very crucial development, the 'Russian Orthodox' identity moved from its old imperial and meta-ethnic meaning to a more exclusive and ethnically bound one. In any case, it became more pronounced, more publicly visible, and more politically instrumental.

Another aspect, which exist another tendency: creation and construction of new identities on base of former soviet mentality. We observe the strong and powerful efforts of Russia to monopolize political influence, information and communication processes: to create common cultural and political area. When we are talking about Russia's policy toward European integration, especially about European integration of the former soviet republics and Russian reaction on it, we can note concrete mechanisms of constructing of intussusceptions of the political elites and population of these states as a part of common Eurasian space.

This applies for national identity as a dependent variable in general and for national identity in the post-communist countries in particular.There is significant variation in the level of national identity between countries. Such factors can explain the variation in the level of national identity between countries: ethno cultural homogeneity: homogeneous countries show higher levels of national identity than ethno-culturally diverse countries; economic performance: countries where economic transition has been successful (high degree of economic liberalization and recovery from the contraction of the national economy after 1991) show higher levels of pride than those less successful in the transition to a free market economy/

In all countries national identity seems to be primarily based non-political sources such as pride in the nation's history, cultural achievements and achievements in sports and science.In most countries national identity is primarily determined by socio-demographic factors, especially age and ethnic background.

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