

## EUROPE AS AN OBJECT OF DESIRE: UKRAINE BETWEEN “PSYCHOLOGICAL EUROPE” AND THE “SOVIET MENTALITY”<sup>1,2</sup>

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*Abstract.* The article explores the idea of Europe in the Ukrainian national imaginary and its correlates in the mental patterns of contemporary Ukrainians. The conceptual tension exists between the imaginary “Us” (an affirmative “Ukraine is Europe”) and the real “Us” embedded in Soviet practices and mental attitudes. The main actors articulating the concept of Europe are distinguished: political elites / “officials”; cultural elites / “intellectuals”; civil society / “activists”; and lay citizens / “electorate”. It is proved that for most Ukrainians Europe is not a value-in-itself; it is an empty signifier with variable content defined by divergent agendas. For Ukrainian politicians, declarative European integration is a geopolitical tool aimed at obtaining prestige/recognition and a protective umbrella from Russia, with few repercussions on domestic policies. For cultural elites, “Europe” stands as a common cultural heritage, a soil breeding searches for national identity. Immanent Europeanness of the Ukrainian culture is proclaimed in the “frontstage” discourse, while in the “backstage” discourse, the lack of (self)recognition manifests itself through the symptom of being “more European than Europe”. Attempts “to acquire ourselves via Europe” are complemented with the desire “to rescue Europe via acquiring ourselves”. For citizens, “Europe” is a pathway to prosperity (“to build Europe at home”); yet, the content remains vague. A political

- 1 This research was conducted during my tenure as a Ukraine guest lecturer (Ukraine-Gastdozentur) at Justus Liebig University Giessen within the research cluster LOEWE “Regions of Conflict in Eastern Europe”.
- 2 The Ukrainian version of this article is published in: *The Culturology Ideas*, 2020, №2, Vol. 18, pp. 37–54.



struggle unfolds between the stakeholders of the captured state and public activists for the cornerstone ideas and principles, as well as for the trust of lay citizens as a political resource.

*Keywords:* symbolic Europe, Europeanization, facade discourse, backstage discourse, instrumental value, mental attitudes, statism, paternalism.

We were looking for Europe, but we found Ukraine.

## Introduction

This article opens with a quote from an unknown author, which turned into a mythologeme having made its way from the "folk wisdom" on the Maidan (Pryvalko, 2017: 654; Hetmanchuk, 2014; Onuka & DachDaughters, 2015) to songs that codify new meanings around which the 'new Ukrainian nation' unites (Sevastyanov & TaRuta, 2015) and to the government guidelines for celebrating the Freedom and Dignity Day (Shukaiuchy Yevropu, 2015; Den Hidnosti, 2018; Tematychnyi vechir, 2018). I suggest problematizing this statement as such that does not fix the objective reality but functions on several levels instead. As a performative act, it affirms the reality of "European Ukraine". As a political trope, it rationalizes post-factum the spontaneous movement of the Maidan and, more specifically, the shift in the agenda from EU integration to nation-building. Finally, at a deeper level, it is a Lacanian symptom signaling the repressed trauma of non-recognition by significant Others and pointing to symbolic Europe as an object of desire.

I will trace the genealogy of the idea of Europe in the Ukrainian national imaginary and its correlates in the mental patterns of contemporary Ukrainians. The main conceptual tension exists between the imaginary "Us" (an affirmative "Ukraine is Europe") and the real "Us" substantially embedded in Soviet practices and mental patterns. The content of the "Europeanness" as a supposedly immanent feature of "Ukrainianness" is considered, as well as the fluctuations of its significance for national (self)identification. Within such an approach, it is important to analytically distinguish between the following actors who articulate the concept of Europe: political elites / "officials", cultural elites / "intellectuals", civil society / "activists", and ordinary citizens / "electorate". Discursive games with "Europe" as an empty signifier usually stand as a means for achieving other goals, external to it.

The Maidan of 2013-14, triggered by the refusal of the Mykola Azarov government to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union, inter alia, caused a new wave of interest in the significance of the idea of Europe and Europeanness in the Ukrainian

context. Among the important recent studies are the publications of Volodymyr Yermolenko (2010; 2014; 2019), Nadiya Trach (2014), Andrew Wilson (2015), Yaroslava Prykhoda (2005); in a broader context – of Anatoly Akhutin (2015) and an edited volume of translations published by the “Dukh i Litera” publishing house (Joas and Wiegandt, 2014). All these researchers note the semantic dissimilarity of symbolic “Europe” and the EU, while interpreting their correlation differently. They also mention the essential heterogeneity of the concept of Europe in the Ukrainian discourses – from the prefix “Euro” in the sense of modern, progressive (like in Euro-renovation (Yermolenko, 2010)) to “European values” as a common denominator for “civilization” (including tolerance, human rights, welfare, political and economic freedoms, etc.). The most resonant was the projection of this topic on the existing cleavages, namely the concepts of “two Europes” (Yermolenko, 2014) and of “two Ukraines” (Ryabchuk, 2003; Ryabchuk, 2019). Yermolenko thematizes “old” / “Protestant” / “Western” Europe as a “Europe of rules”, and “new” / “Catholic” & “Orthodox” / “Eastern” Europe as a “Europe of faith”. Both supposedly need one another for the preservation of Europe as such. Thus, the metaphorical Berlin Wall, recently revived in European academic and public discourses as an insurmountable divide between the imaginary West and East, is interpreted as a bridge worth maintaining. Ryabchuk, while working with internal divisions in Ukraine, interprets them ideationally – as competing models of “Ukraine”, a European and a (post)Soviet one, seeing in them not a confrontation of the future and the past but different projects of the future. It is worth to mention the contextually similar “searches for Europe in themselves” in the neighboring countries, primarily in the Baltic States and in the Visegrad Four, as well as in “new Eastern Europe” – Georgia and Moldova.

Political elites: the EU as a geopolitical umbrella, or Europeanization outwards

The development of Ukraine after 1991 is often interpreted by political scientists as a cyclical or pendulum movement – from the pro-Western to pro-Russian sentiments and back, from the rising autocratic tendencies to democratization and back (Kuzio, 2012). Accordingly, the popularity of the European path for Ukraine is exposed as seasonal fashion. It is aptly captured in a joke quoted (again anonymously!) by American political scientists: “In the spring Ukraine leans toward the West, but in the fall toward the East” (Stepan, Linz, & Yadav, 2011, p. 179). Despite the obvious allusion to Russia's gas policy, there is also something else here: the naturalization of the versatility of Ukraine's geopolitical orientations through linking them to the cycles of nature. It implicates othering of Ukrainians as aborigines close to nature and far from stable civilizational preferences, thus, unreliable as strategic partners.

However, Paul d'Anieri renders it a tactical trick of Ukrainian officials, a sort of "power of the powerless":

"...Ukraine's state weakness provides a strength in international bargaining. (...) the constraints created by domestic politics can be used as a source of power in international negotiations, because they increase the credibility of one's refusal to make further concessions" (D'Anieri, 2012, p. 454).

Andrew Wilson and Nick Popescu call the satellite countries of the former Soviet bloc "collective Tito" (2009, p. 25): missing out on resources to maintain an independent foreign policy, they attempt to gain as much as possible from the confrontation of big players. Indeed, in the current clash of the Euro-Atlantic world and Russia, geopolitically "small nations" trapped in the imposed conditionality have to either stick to the proposals of the stronger (to bandwagon) or to balance in search of "windows of opportunity." Interestingly, if scaling out to the global chessboard, Russia can be interpreted as a similar "Tito" lacking resources. The Kremlin uses to its advantage the opposition of the "West" attempting to keep its hegemony, and China steadily strengthening its position. In a recent book about Putin, Mark Galeotti (2019) calls the Kremlin's foreign policy "political judo" – no rules, no predefined strategy, just using the enemy's power against him.

Going beyond the cyclical model, where "Western" and "Eastern" Ukraine elect in turns tentatively "pro-European" (Kravchuk, Yushchenko, Poroshenko) and tentatively "pro-Russian" presidents (Kuchma, Yanukovich, Zelenskyy), an alternative interpretation becomes possible. First and foremost, the continuity in post-Soviet Ukraine's foreign policy is striking: despite electoral slogans and political programs (which can be relatively pro-Western or pro-Russian), the real actions of politicians after being elected tend to a "middle course", mostly forced by external circumstances. Thus, Leonid Kuchma, who positioned himself as a candidate of the Russian-speaking pragmatic East, after his election – instead of the promised introduction of Russian as a second state language – published a book with the eloquent title "Ukraine is not Russia" (2004). Whereas Viktor Yushchenko, who came to power in a wave of mass protests against anti-democratic tendencies, albeit known for his anti-Soviet historical policies, was forced to reach agreements with the Kremlin in the practical domain.

Roughly all the Ukrainian presidents have followed a strategy of balancing between the West and Russia. Their actions were mostly reactive, responding to the moves of external players. Contrary to the belief spread by the Russian media about the aggressive actions of the EU and the United States in Ukraine, it was mostly in the low priority zone for the West. The Ukrainian direction of its foreign policy was largely determined by relations with the Kremlin. At the same time, these relations were not always antagonistic. Only the periods of

conflict created "windows of opportunity" for Ukrainian government officials to acquire some limited agency. Early 1990s were marked with consolidated efforts of major geopolitical players to force Ukraine's renunciation of its nuclear potential, and it surrendered. A new period of "big consensus" could be launched again, wrapped as strategic reconciliation with Russia in the face of "bigger threats." Within such a scenario, the corridor of maneuvers for Ukraine would be collapsing.

It is Ukraine that has been on the demanding side in the relations with the EU requesting deeper integration, whereas Brussels has been "talking down accession prospects while building a Schengen wall" (Wilson & Popescu, 2009, p. 51). Back in June 1994, Ukraine was the first CIS state to sign the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU, which, however, was ratified only four years later. At that time, President Kuchma signed a decree entitled "Strategy on Ukraine's Integration with the European Union", manifesting the increased foreign policy ambitions. In 2004, there was a powerful wave of EU Eastern Enlargement, when eight countries of the former Soviet bloc, including neighboring Poland, acquired the EU membership. After the Orange Revolution, both the Ukrainian citizens and the Ukrainian politicians developed expectations of the membership prospects for Ukraine. Instead, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) was formulated, setting out common strategies for such culturally, geographically and historically distinct countries as Algeria and Israel, Tunisia and Syria, Azerbaijan and Ukraine, etc. And even after the creation of the Eastern Partnership strategy (2008) focused on the FSU countries, neither the specificity of the Ukrainian situation nor the importance of the country as the largest (and probably geopolitically most important) Eastern Partnership state was taken into account. As Wilson and Popescu aptly put it,

"while Europe has largely been content to sit back and rely on what Carl Bildt calls the "magnetism" of the European model, Russia – not usually considered particularly adept at the use of soft power – has learned the power of incentives as well as of coercion" (2009, p. 27).

At least since the Orange Revolution of 2004, which Kremlin spin-doctors call "a very useful catastrophe for Russia" (Wilson & Popescu, 2009, p. 29), special operations were launched in the post-Soviet region to discredit the European project and increase the attractiveness of the Slavic brotherhood (Mahda, 2015). Whereas the EU was sticking to the technocratic strategy of "enlargement-light", or cooperation without integration, disregarding the resulting symbolic loss of the EU soft power and constantly suppressing hopes for real accession to the EU. The striking gap in the counterparties' approaches lies in Russia's active interest in the region and Ukraine specifically – against the West's disinterest in general and ignoring the de facto strategic competition of "soft powers".

It is worth mentioning that all the Presidents of Ukraine (including Viktor Yanukovich) declared the European vector of Ukraine's development as a strategic priority, and this was recently enshrined in the Constitution. At the same time, each of them has done remarkably little to bring national systems in line with European requirements. There is a salient *inconsistency of agendas*: for Ukrainian politicians, European integration is a geopolitical issue that should not affect domestic policies; whereas, the Brussels officials emphasize economic cooperation and the adoption of European *acquis communautaire*. Simplifying, rapprochement with the EU has two key aspects, according to Ukrainian officials: *prestige / recognition* – to join the elite club of selected countries; *protective umbrella* – distancing from Russia, necessary to obtain or maintain sovereignty. At the same time, internal reforms by the European model are seen as undesirable, as government transparency and accountability can undermine the existing system of patron-client networks that preserves the political power of incumbents and guarantees financial flows for the regional clans behind them.

To sum up, the cornerstone priority of Ukrainian government officials has been the preservation of their own power and of the current system that provides for enrichment through privatizing the state. Under these conditions, declarative Europeanization stands as an effective lever to curb the Kremlin's overly aggressive actions undermining the autonomy of the Ukrainian government. The declarations of the "movement towards Europe" as a strategic priority imply solely the foreign policy, with few repercussions on domestic reforms. Such a selective approach, or European integration *à la carte*, clicks well with the (post)Soviet political culture of façade changes, or "Potemkin democracy" (Holmes, 2002). Its ideological locus is a gap, a rift that is more formative than the content of any proclaimed ideology, be it Europeanization or nationalism, "sovereign democracy" or digitalization.

### Cultural elites: "stolen West" and "holier than the Pope"

At the onset of the movement for Ukraine's self-determination, claims of its immanent "Europeanness" served as a symbolic tool of emancipation from Russia. The structure of national discourse is determined by the dichotomy of "Europe" (later, "West") and "Russia". Its conceptual core is the civilizational unity of symbolic Europe, from which the "eastern neighbor" is excluded. At the same time, the specific content of "Europeanness" remains dubious. The common denominator is "Europe" as a "standard of civilization" (Stivachtis, 2006) exposing the binary magical thinking in the system of coordinates "the good against the evil". It is no coincidence that racist markers like "Asiope",

"Mordva", "Barbarians", as well as negative labels "Mordor", "Shadow of Civilization" (Kebuladze, 2016), etc. are used to inferiorize Russia. Such a structure is common to all "small nations" (Kundera, 1984) between Germany and Russia. The specificity of Russian colonialism presented by the Polish-American researcher Ewa M. Thompson is indicative thereof. She emphasizes that Russian domination is based on military power, while culturally Moscow is much inferior to more developed peripheries (Poland and the Baltic countries, in the first place):

"The Russian colonial rule was usually based on power alone, rather than on a combination of power and knowledge. The nations of the western and south-western rim of the Russian empire *perceived themselves as civilizationally superior to the metropolis*. Their psychology as conquered peoples was different from that of the colonial subjects of Britain"<sup>3</sup> (2000, p. 18).

Similar motives could be found in the major debates around the Ukrainian identity<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the famous writer and public intellectual of the 19th century Ivan Nechuy-Levytsky warned against the threat of "Russification" of Ukrainian literature, which would be a step "back to ancient life" (Nechuy-Levytsky, 1998, p. 47). He distinguishes between the pro-European liberal movement in St. Petersburg at the time that sympathizes with the oppressed classes and nations, and the conservative Moscow movement, which is an expression of the "Eastern civilization" based on "Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality" as well as on the "hatred to everything European." The writer puts it in the following way:

"Old Moscow, with its churches, monasteries, large bells, with its disgust to the enlightenment and with its love for clergy and church literature, since ancient times looked belligerently at Europe, absconded from Europeans and proudly repelled the European civilization" (Nechuy-Levytsky, 1998, p. 39).

Mykhailo Drahomanov, another prominent public figure in late 19th century, voices consonant views:

"...our Ukraine, having become a "province" in the 19th century, lagged behind advanced Europe more than it would have, had it gone its way since the 17th century without being interrupted, and also had it broken off with Muscovy" (1996, p. 403). "Now, to leave the ranks of the "backward" or even "henchmen", there is no other way than to start, as

3 From here onwards, the italic is mine.

4 For the interesting materials on the Ukrainian literary discourse of Europe, I am indebted to Yaroslava Prykhoda's insightful research (2015).

much as possible, looking closely at the European thought and working as directly as possible and grounding our work on a maximally broad foundation that would go beyond the circumstances and borders of Russia, to come out of the old and narrow Ukrainian-Russian soil onto a new and *broad European-Slavic one*" (1996, p. 404).

Ivan Franko, one of the most iconic writers and public intellectuals in the Ukrainian history, was skeptical about the prospects of "European Russia":

"At the beginning of the 18th century, having been torn by the mighty hand of Peter the Great out of centuries of hibernation and forcibly pushed into Europe, that privileged part of the Russian society started snatching feverishly from the Western culture everything shining and striking, unusual and new. Without bothering itself to chew and digest what was gained by Europe due to hard work throughout centuries, the Russian intelligentsia civilizes itself only superficially: under the fashionable haircuts and trendy coats ancient barbarians are hidden, with culture stuck to their surface without coming into their bone and blood; bought with money, picked up in passing, having become their trophy not their property, not their daily bread... They're rushing to eat this bread of European culture, yet later on they cannot digest it" (1986, p. 293-294).

Europe and Russia are not presented in the Ukrainian national discourse as alternative types of civilization, or alternative modernities, for that matter. Instead, Russia is perceived as an empire that suppresses the development of the Ukrainian nation not only politically but also culturally. It is supposedly incapable of cultural hegemony due to its own backwardness. At the same time, Europe stands as a floating signifier of progress and cultural development per se. Mykola Zerov, a prominent scholar and poet from Ukrainian "Executed Renaissance", aptly coins it: "...a universal, or, as we often say nowadays, a European meaning" (quoted in: Prykhoda, 2005, p. 51). This universalism is not opposed to national optics. On the contrary, it is presented as its necessary prerequisite, its context and, to a certain extent, a protective umbrella. As the contemporary Ukrainian researcher Yaroslava Prykhoda rightly notes, in this discourse "national means all-national". An objective is articulated to search for "nationality in form, but not in the content; the content must be Europeanized" (Prykhoda, 2005, p. 47). Nationality appears as a framework "that should be filled with the achievements of the modern science and of the European culture" (Prykhoda, 2005, p. 49). On the other hand, the European aspirations of the Russians are being undermined as not feasible, in contrast to the inherent "Europeanness" of the Ukrainian culture. As Mykola Zerov claims:



"There has never been a blank wall between Europe and Ukraine in which windows had to be cut through. (1995, p. 78) ...in our country, the sprouts of the European culture made their way everywhere through a thousand of imperceptible chinks and cracks, being accepted slowly, imperceptibly, but with all the pores of the social body" (1995, p. 585).

Thus, the immanent belonging of the Ukrainian culture to the family of European nations is asserted. Fantastically similar to Kundera's famous claim is Borys Krupnytsky's statement in the article published in Germany in 1948: "Ukraine, while physically belonging to Eastern Europe, spiritually belongs to Western Europe" (quoted in: Prykhoda, 2005, p. 62). However, at a deeper level, both the deep influence and the kinship of the Russian culture are acknowledged. Panteleymon Kulish, who created one of the first Ukrainian alphabets, named after him "kulishivka", and also was the first to translate the Bible into the modern Ukrainian, formulates it in the following way:

"Ukrainians, as I have not once heard from ethnographers and still believe so, lie with their heads to Europe and their feet to Asia; they are very capable of rising from the primordial darkness to all sorts of subtleties of enlightenment" (1930).

The problem how to deal with the "eastern" component of Ukrainianness arises once and again. Should it be rejected as something imposed from the outside that has not touch the core of the national character? Or is Ukraine doomed to the role of Janus turned westward with one face and eastward with the other one?

Another ubiquitous motive is the lack of recognition from Europe, explicitly articulated in the Slavophiles' critique: "Our domestic Europeans... turn away from Moscow and look to Europe, and Europe (and America) itself looks to Moscow and expects a new word from it" (quoted in: Prykhoda, 2005, p. 54).

In the twentieth century, at the height of the Cold War, the trope of the "stolen West" emerged. As early as 1952, the Romanian researcher Mircea Eliade published the following lines in Paris: "These cultures [of Eastern Europe – VK]... are on the verge of extinction. ... Doesn't Europe feel the amputation of part of its flesh? After all, all these countries are in Europe, all these peoples belong to the European community" (Eliade, 1952, p. 29).

The Czech writer Milan Kundera later formulated this as "the tragedy of Central Europe" (1984) that is politically in the East but culturally belongs to the West (p. 34). Kundera's program text offers a set of nodal points that structure the national discourses in the region. It is the *lack of subjectivity* and sovereignty of the peoples forced to play the role of pawns on the world chessboard, thus appearing in world history as "victims and outsiders" rather than "conquerors". The *inconstancy of national borders* that are fragile and re-drawn with

each new historical situation (p. 35), which generates fundamental existential insecurity. Even more important is *the arbitrary choice of national identity* under the condition of "the greatest variety within the smallest space" (p. 33), where languages of modernization (vehicles of education, science, and eventually career) are the languages of "big nations", and anyone's ethnic origin is usually a mixture of close Slavic ethnicities with an add-on of the "Jewish genius". At first glance, such a configuration is essentially European, in tune with the official slogan of the EU "Unity in Diversity". However, Hegel's verdict of "non-historical peoples" marks the "*historical inferiority*" complex of the nations of the region.

Borrowing from Erving Goffman's terminology, the split into the "frontstage" and "backstage" discourses is indicative thereof. On the surface, the indisputable affiliation with "the European community" is asserted, yet at deeper levels it is problematized and undermined. This lack of (self)recognition exposes itself through the claim of being "holier than the Pope", or "more European than Europe". In Georgia, for instance, it is articulated in the trope of "Europe's oldest Christian civilization." As Davit Usupashvili, the former Head of the Georgian parliament, put it: "Georgia used to be Europe even before Europe knew it was Europe" (quoted in: Tsuladze, 2017, p. 163). Along the same lines, the Czech philosopher Ondřej Slačálek argues that "Central Europe sees itself as "more Western than the West", which it believes to be frivolous, not having had to test its values in confrontation with the enemy" (Slačálek, 2016, p. 38). The contemporary Belarusian philosopher Olga Shparaga provides another twist to these musings. According to her analysis, "New Europe becomes *the embodiment of the idea of Europe in its contemporary form*" (Shparaga, 2007, p. 10). As in the post-WWII era Western Europe was mostly concerned with economic recovery and peace-building; while Eastern Europe was "desperately fighting for its European identity" (ibid.).

The resonant idea of "the Asian Renaissance" formulated by Mykola Khvylovy, a prominent figure in early Soviet Ukraine, could be interpreted in a similar vein, especially if put together with his other popular concept of "psychological Europe". His reiteration of Spengler's diagnosis of "the decline of Europe" is followed with a solution, which is the combination of the Faustian cultural heritage and the Asian cultural energies, naturally present in Ukraine. The recipe of "*finding ourselves through Europe*", easily traced in the Ukrainian national discourse from Ivan Franko through Yurii Shevelov to Oksana Zabuzhko, here inverts into its opposite – and at the same time a complementary one – "*to rescue Europe through finding ourselves*". The significance of "psychological Europe" and of the European cultural heritage in overcoming provincialism and acquiring oneself gets actualized within the Maidan movement. The modern Ukrainian philosopher Volodymyr Yermolenko calls it "axiological Europe" (Yermolenko, 2019), however, the meaning remains almost unchanged.

Yermolenko's interview with the famous writer Yuri Andrukhovych is indicative here. He notes "the post-Maidan 'messianic' attitude" of Ukrainians: "After the Orange Revolution and after Euromaidan we had the feeling that Ukraine was *Europe's avant-garde*. That some developments were taking place here that were ahead of developments in Europe" (Andrukhovych & Yermolenko, 2019, p. 84). However, it eventually changed with disillusionment, both in Europe and in their own naivety. Andrukhovych formulates this later, "soberer" perception as becoming aware of the "love triangle" between Europe, Ukraine and Russia: "We, Ukrainians, are in love with Europe, Europe is in love with Russia, while Russia hates both us and Europe, but behaves differently towards us and Europe" (ibid, p. 82). Yermolenko elaborates on this Freudian interpretation, describing Europe as "polyamorous", ready for relations with both Ukraine and Russia, while "traditional" Ukraine wants a stable marriage with Europe, and Russia practices "sadistic" love (ibid). The imposition of a love metaphor on international relations is yet another symptom of this trauma of non-recognition.

Going back to the resentment of "stolen West", I would conclude with a quotation from Kundera's 1984 text. What makes the essay so up-to-date is not that much the fundamental value of Europe as a regulative idea for the Eastern European searches for self-identity but the void in the endpoint, when the euphoria of movement changes with frustration at the final destination. The text ends with an important statement:

"The real tragedy for Central Europe, then, is not Russia but Europe: this Europe that represented a value so great that the director of the Hungarian News Agency was ready to die for it, and for which he did indeed die. Behind the iron curtain, he did not suspect that the times had changed and that *in Europe itself Europe was no longer experienced as a value*" (Kundera, 1984, p. 38).

### Citizens: "Europeanization" of Ukraine as a pathway to prosperity

At least since the publication of Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1996), the perception of Ukraine as a "cleft country" has become wide-spread, with a dividing line going either along the Zbruch or the Dnieper river demarcating the "pro-European West" and the "pro-Russian East", thus essentialized basing on historical heritage and cultural specifics. Oftentimes this thinking leads to the conclusion: "As long as elections matter in Ukraine, there will be powerful domestic as well as international incentives to hew to a middle course" (D'Anieri, 2012, p. 454). A more flexible (and optimistic?) approach emphasizes the floating borderline between the European and the (post)Soviet mentality that has been supposedly shifting eastwards since 1991. If in

the March 1991 referendum only three western regions voted against the preservation of the Soviet Union (the same ones that supported Viacheslav Chornovil's candidacy in the presidential race in December of the same year), in the 1994 elections the "pro-European" electorate already included the whole Right Bank Ukraine. This electoral cartography seems to prove that today the border of "mental Europe" coincides with the front line in Luhansk and Donetsk regions. The 2019 elections undermined this *mythology of "creeping Europeanization"* of Ukraine.

Counter to the geographical interpretation of the spread of pro-European sentiments from West to East, I suggest a social reading. Indeed, throughout the 2000s and 2010s, there was formed a certain stratum of people interested in "Europeanization" of Ukraine, both external (EU integration) and internal one (domestic reforms by the European model). Assuming that this contingent was prominent in the Euromaidan movement, the research on the latter gives an approximate social profile of the core of Ukrainian Euro-sympathizers. Thus, a study by Oleksii Shestakovskiy (2014), conducted during the first wave of protests (probably most closely related to the demand for the signing of the Association Agreement with the EU), focuses on comparing the profile of Maidaners with those of a median Ukrainian. The researcher notes: "On the whole, the urban middle strata were *overrepresented* among Euromaidan participants: economically active, educated, rather young, and enterprising people" (Shestakovskii, 2015, p. 50). The most divergent parameter was the level of education: among the respondents 67% had completed higher education, while among adult Ukrainians this indicator is 13% (*ibid.*, p. 48). These results are in line with another study conducted by Olga Onuch (2014). According to it, a median protester has a permanent job and above secondary formal education, he "voted regularly, had experienced very little contact with civic or social-movement groups, wanted a better political future for Ukraine" and "cared more about the economic and political direction of the government's domestic policies" than about formal relations with the EU or Russia (Onuch, 2014, p. 47).

For most Euromaidan participants, the slogan "Ukraine is Europe" signified the desire to build "at home" a system based on "European values" (*ibid.*, p. 48). In this context, it is especially insightful to compare the values of Euromaidan activists with the values of residents of European countries. Oleksii Shestakovskiy made a research based on Shalom Schwartz' values theory (2015). The results of the study show that, first, the values of the protesters were strikingly different from the values of Ukrainians in general: "The majority of them valued the general good much more highly than power, achievement, or comfort for themselves personally, and for this they were willing to struggle and assume risks" (Shestakovskii, 2015, p. 56). The values of conformity and personal well-being prevail among the inhabitants of Ukraine. Whereas the values of *universalism, benevolence and independence* dominated

among the Maidaners, while the values of power-wealth, conformity and hedonism were the least important for them. Interestingly, in terms of value profiles, Euromaidan participants are much closer to the residents of Northern and Western Europe than to their compatriots or residents of neighboring countries. The closest to Maidaners' value profiles are the ones of Finland, Germany and Norway, while some parameters have no analogues in the median profiles of any country – such as the high value of universalism and stimulation (openness to novelty and risk), as well as the very low value of conformity.

Continuing his research, Shestakovskiy (2018) emphasizes that there is no sociological correlate of European values as such, which would be common to all EU member states as opposed to the rest. At the same time, the closest to the normative vision of "European values" is the profile of the richest countries in North-Western Europe, dominated by the values of development based on openness to change and social focus – as opposed to conservation and personal focus. On the map of European countries, Ukraine (along with the rest of Eastern European countries) is in the opposite corner, determined by conservation values. The diachronic aspect demonstrates further divergence in the directions of movement: if Northern Europe gradually increases the emphasis on the common good, Ukraine (like the rest of Eastern Europe) is moving towards increasing the value of self-enhancement. However, this survey is based on the data from the sixth wave of the European Social Survey (2012), which leaves hope for somewhat different recent results.

In any case, *there is a salient gap* between the values and practices of the most active part of the society and the rest of Ukrainians. It is the "activists", often quite misleadingly called "civil society", who are the engine of the country's "Europeanization" assessed as comprehensive political and economic domestic reforms. After 2014, *"the sandwich model"* made its way into common parlance, implying the joint pressure on government officials in the bottom-up direction from the civic activists and top-down from Western donors, which is indispensable to advance the reform agenda. Despite a certain success of this model, the state apparatus and the patron-client networks behind it have worked out countermeasures to neutralize the efficacy of "the sandwich model". One of the most efficient measures is to break the link between the society and its most active part, when the actions of "activists" are delegitimized by the lack of support on the side of the population. A symbolic struggle for the people's trust as a political capital unfolds between politicians, officials, and civic activists. It is noteworthy that the symbolic support to the Maidan has been decreasing over time: not only the share of those who claim to have stopped supporting it increased from 24.5% in 2015 to 28.9% in 2017; but also the share of those who claim to have never supported it paradoxically increased from 26.9% to 29.6%. Accordingly, the share of the stable supporters dropped from 43.1% of respondents in 2015 to

35.8% in 2017 (Chebotarova, 2019). This resonates with a disappointment in Ukraine's European prospects: after 2016, the steadily growth of the EU integration supporters, observed at least since early 2000s, stopped in favor of the option to refrain from participating in any integration projects (Yevropeiska intehratsiia, 2018, p. 4).

The results of opinion polls show a steady increase in the number of supporters of Ukraine's EU integration course. The Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine has been measuring public attitudes towards various integration projects since 2000 (which is indicative in itself). In 2011, for the first time, the number of supporters of joining the EU exceeded the number of supporters of the integration into the Customs Union (43.7% vs. 30.5%), and in 2014 they made up the majority of the population (50.5%). Moreover, since 2014, the idea of European integration has been supported by the majority in all age groups and all regions of Ukraine (except for Donbass) (Zolkina, 2014). It is noteworthy that it is accompanied with a sharp deterioration in attitudes to participation in Russian integration projects: since the beginning of the Russian aggression, the negative attitude to Ukraine's accession to the Customs Union outweighs the positive one (61.1% "against" and 24.5% "for" in May 2014), as opposed to 20% "against" and 58.1% "for" in December 2009) (ibid.). However, Ukraine's geopolitical orientations has never belonged to existential issues concerning ordinary Ukrainians. From 2000 to 2013, according to the results of the annual sociological monitoring of the Institute of Sociology of NASU, 30–40% of respondents did not have answers to questions about the integration vector. In various surveys on the most urgent needs, *socio-economic issues traditionally lead by a large margin*. Thus, after the 2019 elections, among the urgent tasks for the newly elected president and his team the following were mentioned: the ceasefire in Donbass (71.5% in August and 73.7% in November 2019), raising living standards (salaries, social benefits, etc.) – 31.2% and 37.4%, reduction of utility payments (31.2% and 37.4%). The intensification of cooperation with the EU and NATO was noted as an important task by only 5.7% of respondents in August and 9.3% in November 2019 (Hromadska dumka, 2019).

A separate study on European integration (Yevropeiska intehratsiia, 2018) reveals a similar picture. *Europe is not a value-in-itself for most Ukrainians*. They tend to support the course of European integration as long as it promises them a better standard of living. Thus, among the main benefits of EU membership, respondents note an increase in people's living standards (38%), help in the fight against corruption (27%) and free movement of people abroad (26%). At the same time, the main obstacles to EU membership are, again, corruption (43%), insufficient economic development of the country (38%) and low living standards (28%). Despite a gradual increase in the number of respondents who consider themselves Europeans, they are still in the minority (44%). According to the respondents, in order to feel European, they need

a certain level of material well-being (46%), the feeling of being legally protected (34%) and respect for the values of democracy and human rights (21%). The feeling of freedom is crucial for 17% of respondents.

The vast majority of Ukrainians *do not have personal "experience of Europe"*, so they use ideologemes and mythologemes stemming from various sources. Only residents of Western Ukraine have a higher percentage of citizens with passports for travel abroad and the experience of such travels. However, this experience is quite specific, as it is more related to low-paid manual work and living in special labor "ghettos". In the rest of the country, 65–75% do not have foreign travel passports at all, about 90% have not traveled to EU countries in the last two years (Yevropeiska intehratsiia, 2018).

There are still some good reasons for cautious optimism, as the vast majority expresses support for reforms in Ukraine, *regardless of the prospects of EU accession*. Thus, as in other Eastern Partnership countries, the academic discourse of "Europeanization" is gaining ground as *a theoretical alternative* to "European integration." It exposes the EU as a normative model for the transformation of national systems beyond the process of gaining EU membership. Radaelli identifies three main areas of the "European model" influence: domestic structures; public policy; and cognitive and normative structures (2003, p. 35). The latter implies a significant *transformation of cornerstone cultural values and social norms*, which affects the level of everyday practices of various segments of the population. It is the deepest (and most inertial) level of change, which stands as the key to sustainable Europeanization, yet often falls "off the radar" of public attention.

Various surveys' results highlight the positive and negative trends in the Ukrainian society in this respect. On the one hand, there is *a pronounced demand for a "strong hand"*, which can be explained both by the inertia of Soviet paternalism and by the gravity and systemic nature of the crises dramatically worsening the living standards of Ukrainians. In a study by the Institute of Sociology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (Parashchevin, 2018), 60.5% of respondents (rather or strongly) agreed with the statement "For normal development, the country needs a "strong hand" rather than talks about democracy".

At the same time, a certain move away from paternalism is registered. Thus, there is a growing sense of responsibility for the country's development. In the 2013 survey, 67% of respondents stressed the absence of any responsibility, only 1.8% acknowledged their full and 15.8% – partial responsibility for ongoing events. In 2018 these categories amounted to 55.3%, 3.3% and 29.9%, respectively (Parashchevin, 2018, p. 465). The dynamics of statist attitudes is also indicative in the context, as well as the dilemma of the imaginary choice between rights and freedoms and personal well-being. A survey conducted in December 2019 by the Ilko Kucheriv Foundation for

Democratic Initiatives (Reformy, 2020) fixed a pronounced demand for a strong welfare state: 71% of respondents believe that “the state should provide maximum of free services – education, health care, pensions, even if it means increase of the taxation”; and 70% believe that “most people in Ukraine would not be able to live without constant state support”. At the same time, the number of those who believe that “the state must ensure the equal “game rules” for every individual and then individuals are responsible for how to use these opportunities” has slightly increased – from 45% in 2018 to 54% in 2019.

This may indicate not so much an ingrained statism (transfer of responsibility to the state as the big Other) but more a demand for social democracy against libertarianism. However, statist attitudes based on the paternalistic perception of the state have a certain social base. They are mostly popular – regionally – in Eastern Ukraine, politically – among the electorate of the “Opposition Platform – For Life” and, to a lesser extent, of the Batkivshchyna party (Reformy, 2020). A similar regional gap in mental attitudes was recorded in a study of the EU integration perceptions. Respondents from Eastern Ukraine not only show a higher level of Euroscepticism – 53.2% emphasize the absence of any benefits from joining the EU, but also they call the President and the government the main drivers of European integration, thus leveling the political agency of other actors. In contrast, residents of the West and the Center emphasize the important role of the population (28.9% and 23.3%) and NGOs (14.7% and 11%) in this context (Yevropeiska intehratsiia, 2018).

The polarization of the population on the choice between freedom and prosperity is worth a close examination. In 2018, 36% of respondents expressed their readiness “to suffer from misery but keep their freedom and respect for all civil rights”, and 26% agreed “to give in their rights and freedoms in exchange for welfare”. A relative majority of 39% could not decide on this choice. In 2019, there was an increase in the number of supporters of both alternatives, while the “uncertain” category was shrinking. Yet, the majority of respondents (52.4%) consider democracy to be the most desirable type of government for Ukraine. Only the inhabitants of the East do not express a steady preference to democracy. At the same time, the preference for democracy is reported in all age groups (including the elderly, albeit with a smaller margin) (Reformy, 2020).

In conclusion, it should be noted that the post-Soviet history of Ukraine is a history of permanent crises, in which impoverishment was not only a political meme and a trope of the electoral rhetoric, but also a real life condition for many people. Ukrainians are accustomed to relying on themselves and their close milieu, while somewhat idealizing social policies of the Soviet times. After almost 30 years, living standards remain extremely low for the majority of the population. The main desire is to acquire “decent living standards”, to have urgent socio-economic problems solved. Thus, the main struggle between



political elites and civic activists unfolds around the pathways to these standards, whether it means "Europeanization", democratization, or "our own way" based on historical contingency and socio-political practices of the past. From this vantage point, the watershed is not in the list of reforms proposed by the IMF and Western advisers, but in the citizens' political agency, that is in available opportunities, but also in their ability and will to take responsibility for their own lives and for the country's future.

Conclusions,  
or are Ukrainians 'good weather Europeans'?

The content of the idea of Europe remains rather vague in the minds of Ukrainian people. The vast majority of citizens have never traveled to the EU and do not speak foreign languages sufficiently, so the personal "experience of Europe" is mostly held by officials, labor migrants and the privileged middle class. The latter is quite numerous, but statistically insignificant. Arguably, it forms the core of Ukrainian Euro-optimism that promotes the agenda of "building Europe at home." This agenda envisages reforms of state structures supported by transformed mindsets. Much has been written about the first part: the de-privatization of the state, or its re-claim by the society; transparent game rules and equality before the law; respect for laws and bureaucratic procedures. It is crucial that the majority of Ukrainians support the need for reforms, regardless of the prospects of joining the EU. At the same time, firstly, these changes are usually not associated with changes in lay people's mindsets and practices. Secondly, the path to change is not necessarily linked to the European integration. It shows both the transformation fatigue and the frustration with an unsatisfactory image in the eyes of the significant Other, but also hints on the symbolic media rivalry between the "European" and the "Russian" / "Slavic" pathways to good life.

The collapse of the Soviet Union left a value and identity vacuum in the region: what was a long-awaited opportunity for nation-building and / or liberalization for the active minority / dissidents, plunged the majority into the existential perplexity. Krastev describes it as a state of "paralyzing uncertainty": "a moment when political leaders and ordinary citizens alike are torn between hectic activity and fatalistic passivity, a moment when what was until now unthinkable – the disintegration of the union – begins to be perceived as inevitable" (Krastev, 2017, p. 5). Thus, the triumph of "the end of history" did not resonate significantly in the former "East", which during the 1990s was mostly concerned with the problems of survival under the hyperinflation and total chaos. The key to survival was the use of the only available functionality, which was deideologized Soviet structures and models. Vladimir Fours' diagnosis of the Belarusian society as

“lacking a shared social imaginary” that could enhance “self-limitation and solidarization” (2007, p. 57), holds true for contemporary Ukraine.

The replacement of slogans and banners did not automatically indicate not only transformative changes but even a change of intentions. Government officials and citizens alike understood a common cultural code: the proclamation of a strategic orientation on the Ukrainian and the European did not involve a mass transition to the state language, nor the abandonment of corrupt practices and octroyed law. While agreeing with Mykola Ryabchuk’s general diagnosis to Ukrainian society as ambivalent (2019), I would interpret it not horizontally – as a cleavage between diverse communities, but vertically – as a schizophrenic split into the superficial/proclaimed and the deep/hidden within each community, every identity. Picking up on the psychoanalytic metaphors, the way out of the painful split is through the acceptance of responsibility, through exiting the model of a victim, be it of historic circumstances, evil empires, “wrong” elites or “stupid” compatriots. It is necessary to acknowledge the hidden to minimize the schizophrenic split.

The current setup around Ukraine, presenting a choice between Russia’s aggressive and assimilative intentions and the model of co-sovereignty of “small nations” under the umbrella of the EU – reveals “the European path” as pragmatically suitable. At the same time, it is worth closely monitoring the internal dynamics of the EU project, as well as recognizing that Russia is not just the shadow of the civilization, as Kebuladze (2016) argues. The Soviet mentality is the Shadow of the contemporary Ukrainian nation’s Persona, which awaits to be recognized in order to mitigate the internal conflict of the Ukrainian society. Kundera writes that the real tragedy of Central Europe is that Western Europeans, unlike Eastern Europeans, are not ready to die for the idea of Europe. The tragedy of present-day Ukraine is that we do not know how “to live for it”. Because a genuine re-connection with the European cultural soil would imply autonomy with no heed of the approval from the significant Other. It is the ability to take on the responsibility of an Adult, without a mask of a Hero or a Victim.

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