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The Political and Mental Aspects of Ukraine Integration with Europe

Abstract: This research paper examines Ukraine's path towards European integration. From the 10th to the 12th centuries, Ukraine – then known as Kyivan Rus' – was a strong independent state, but due to internal conflicts and conquests, it became weakened and fell under the influence of other state entities. From the 17th century onwards, as a result of the Pereyaslav agreements (1654 and 1659) between the Cossacks and Moscow, Ukraine found itself increasingly under the sway of Russia, a situation that persisted until the collapse of the "prison of the peoples", the Soviet Union. Despite Russian propaganda portraying Ukraine as an integral part of Russia for a long time due to shared history and culture, in reality, modern Ukraine and Russia are two different countries with distinct political systems, development trajectories, identities, mentalities, fundamental values, and traditions. Ukrainian society, though subjected to Sovietization during communist times and later targeted by political and propaganda actions from the Russian Federation, stands fundamentally opposed to the authoritarian Russian society and closer to the democratic European community. For centuries, Russian authorities sought to colonize and exploit Ukraine for their own interests, attempting to erase Ukrainian identity, language, traditions, and rewriting Ukrainian history, yet they failed to fully assimilate the Ukrainian people despite numerous manipulations and crimes against them. The European, Western development trajectory of Ukraine and its desire to break away from Russia's sphere of influence is one of the main reasons for the current full-scale war. The greatest similarities between Ukraine and European states at the level of mentality include Ukrainian love for freedom, individualism, and desire for democracy, in contrast to Russian despotism and authoritarianism. These distinct features of the Ukrainian mentality have historically preserved and revived the Ukrainian nation, aiding in its further development and providing hope for its future not only geographically and economically but also mentally and spiritually.

Key words: European integration processes, Europe, Ukraine, mentality, European civilization, Eurasian civilization, European value system, national identity

Introduction

As a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine regained its independence and gained the opportunity to build a state based on the values of freedom and democracy after decades of statelessness and numerous attempts to destroy it and its identity (wars, genocide, bans on the Ukrainian language, extermination of Ukrainian

intelligentsia, rewriting of history, etc.). Currently, Ukraine is once again fighting for its survival and independence, as well as the right to join the EU and break away from Russia politically, economically, and mentally. The war initiated by Russia on Ukrainian territory constitutes unacceptable genocide; essentially, it is not a colonial war but an exterminatory one (Snyder, 2022), full of crimes against civilians, destruction of infrastructure, villages and entire cities, terrorism, lies, disgusting propaganda, and threats of using nuclear weapons. Russians are not so much capturing cities and towns in Ukraine (let alone "liberating" them) as they are aiming to annihilate them using aerial bombs and all other possible types of weapons (see photos of destroyed Bakhmut, Marynka, Avdiyivka, Popasna, etc.).

Ukraine's independence is perceived by Russia as a historical mistake, a threat to its statehood, and its alleged "land-gathering mission," which is why it first started an ideological war, then hybrid war (since 2014), and finally full-scale military invasion since February 24, 2022 (more: Hordiichuk, Halapsis, Kozlovets, 2023).

Before the onset of Russian military aggression against Ukraine in 2014, its foreign policy was "multi-vector" and balanced between the West and the East. The lack of a clear foreign policy was largely due to internal instability and the absence of a strong political, economic, and spiritual core, as well as a lack of social unity on issues fundamental to Ukraine's development as a state and Ukrainians as a political nation. Many factors were at play, such as bilingualism with a predominance of the Russian language, one part of the population supporting European development, and another, mainly in the east of the country, supporting the Russian vector of development, as well as a lack of understanding among the majority of the population of the need for Ukraine to join the EU and NATO (likely due to the exclusion of the military threat from Russia from public awareness). It is also worth adding that anti-European and anti-NATO sentiments were regularly and strongly fueled by Russian politicians and agents. The main causes of this turbulent social situation were two related facts. For almost seventy years (1922–1991), Ukraine was a Soviet republic, not only under strong influence of propaganda but also subjected to physical purges (primarily the extermination of the intelligentsia). As a result, the majority of citizens of independent Ukraine had rather limited knowledge not only about European countries (their views were dominated by Soviet narratives and stereotypes) but also about the true history of their own nation. Due to its own history and geopolitical position, the Ukrainian nation has strong ties with European countries and geographically belongs to Europe, but at the same time remains close to Eastern civilization, being under the long-term influence of Russia (Grand Duchy of Moscow, Kingdom of Moscow, Russian Empire, USSR, Russian Federation). These latter influences have distorted the socio-political life and cultural way of life of the Ukrainian people (Lysyak-Rudnytsky, 1993).

The European direction of development has to some extent consolidated Ukrainians, but Soviet patterns of thinking and behavior, nostalgia for the USSR, a lack of personal responsibility for one's own fate and the progress of the Homeland are still present in the mindset of some Ukrainian citizens. For centuries, Ukrainian reality has been characterized by a lack of a common national idea, a diverse ethnic composition, unequal development of historical and geographical regions, a low level of critical thinking, political awareness, and culture among the majority of citizens, as well as stere-

otypes of inferiority and helplessness imposed by the powers controlling the country. Ukrainian intellectuals have tried to promote information about the history and identity of their nation worldwide and articulate its right to create its own independent state. However, their actions were neutralized in various ways by Soviet agents, including deliberate murder and discrediting of such individuals both in Ukraine and in European cities where Ukrainian leaders sought refuge from Soviet persecution and worked to restore independence to their country. Examples include Ukrainian national leaders such as Symon Petlura (killed in broad daylight in Paris in 1926 and discredited as an alleged anti-Semite, an accusation that was refuted in independent Ukraine – Shandro, 2022), Yevhen Konovalets (assassinated in Rotterdam in 1938 – Kuceruk, 2008), etc. This is a very significant factor: the Ukrainian elite was either destroyed or recruited as agents of the Soviet system throughout the existence of the USSR, and even afterwards, until the overthrow of pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych (2014). The Russian Federation still has its agents of influence in Ukraine and around the world, and the consequences of their actions are dangerously underestimated.

The military aggression of Russia has brought death and destruction to Ukraine, but at the same time, it has led to an unprecedented consolidation of Ukrainian society, accelerating necessary radical transformations of public consciousness: an increase in patriotism, interest in the history of Ukraine and its heroes, the popularity and use of the Ukrainian language, the popularization of traditions, etc. Numerous crimes against the military and civilians have shown pro-Russian Ukrainians the true face of Russia.

Currently, the fundamental national idea that unites all Ukrainians is victory in the war with Russia and accession to the EU and NATO, which are seen as a guarantee of independence, successful development, and national security for Ukraine.

In the study of Ukraine's political process towards EU integration, a fundamental issue is the analysis of the basic characteristics of the Ukrainian national mentality and the values held by it in the perspective of their relationship with the values of European civilization. Therefore, our goal is to determine the degree of compatibility of Ukrainian mental reality, values, and expectations with the European development vector of Ukraine. To what extent can their compatibility with the social and cultural environment of Europe be indicated? Our task is to analyze the historical traditions and social ties connecting Ukraine with Western European civilization; to examine and compare the basic values and characteristics of the Ukrainian mentality with the basic principles of the mentality of European countries. The methodology adopted by us is based on methods of analysis and synthesis, generalization, systemic and structural-functional analysis, which allowed for the consideration of the formation and development of the main characteristics of the Ukrainian mentality, to examine how they were shaped, and how they are manifested now. The conclusions of the authors are based on information from scientific sources, results of sociological research, opinions of prominent public figures, etc.

The political aspects of Ukraine integration with Europe

The road of Ukraine to the EU is long and arduous. This is largely due to the problems described above stemming from the influence of the former Soviet communist ide-

ology and, after the fall of the USSR, pro-Russian propaganda, which is generally anti-Western and specifically anti-Ukrainian (seeking to bring Ukraine back into the sphere of Russian influence as a sort of colony). Another significant factor is the high level of corruption in political spheres and the closely related reluctance to implement reforms that would introduce European standards of legality and transparency in public spending. Since Ukraine's declaration of independence on August 24, 1991, until the Russian invasion in 2014, heated debates have been ongoing in Ukrainian society regarding the country's main direction of foreign policy. Within these debates, three possible scenarios for Ukraine's further development were discussed:

1. The Eurocentric direction, which envisaged gradual accession to the EU and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), initially through regional alliances with Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and other European countries;
2. The Eurasian direction, aiming to strengthen political and economic cooperation with Russia, Kazakhstan, and Central Asia;
3. Pursuing its own independent path with an emphasis on global centers of economic development.

The overwhelming majority of the Ukrainian elite and patriotic politicians supported the first option – the European orientation and Ukraine's accession to NATO. Part of Ukrainian society aimed for economic development, support for democratic values and freedom, and the prospect of close cooperation with European countries. Such tendencies were predominantly dominant in Western Ukraine. However, a part of the society, primarily in the east and south of the country, effectively developed business (and other) ties with Russia. Almost no one believed in the possibility of an armed attack by the Russian Federation, and voices warning of such a scenario were very rare. Theoretically, there was no reason for concern. Ukraine, through the Budapest Memorandum (1994), received guarantees (from the Federation itself, the USA, and Great Britain) of the integrity and inviolability of its then borders in exchange for relinquishing nuclear weapons and transferring its arsenal to Russia. People familiar with history and the attitudes and methods of the Russian authorities did not see this assurance as definitive, but they were in the minority. As a result, a possible war with Russia was not widely discussed in the public sphere even after its military invasion of Georgia in 2008. Not even the emerging warnings changed this, that "If the West swallows the pill and forgives Russia the Georgian war, the invasion of «peaceful tanks» into Ukraine will just be a matter of time" (Oleksandr Sushko, scientific director of the Institute of Euro-Atlantic Cooperation (Sushko, 2008)). It is worth noting in this context that Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko and part of the Ukrainian nation supported Georgia at that time, not Russia (Krushelnycky, 2008). However, as it turned out, the warnings about the aggression of the Russian Federation were indeed valid. As one of the authors writes:

> For decades, the Kremlin has accused any state that seeks to finally break free from Moscow's yoke of betrayal and lack of independence. For Russia, it is unbearable to watch as its neighbors and former subjects drift away from it. Unable to admit that the reason for these movements toward independence is Russia's internal unattractiveness, the Kremlin fabricates stories claiming that the decisions of individual nations violate "eternal historical unity" (Samygin, 2023).

At the national level, key moments for strengthening Ukraine's European trajectory were the Orange Revolution (2004–2005) and the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014). The first was a protest against widespread electoral fraud during the presidential elections. Its participants demanded a rerun of the elections, which was eventually achieved – fair and democratic elections were organized. Ukraine expressed its rejection of dictatorship and support for democratic values and freedoms (more: Kuzio, 2005; Wilson, 2005). As for the Revolution of Dignity, it began on November 21, 2013, with the so-called "Euromaidan," when about 1,500 people gathered on the main square in Kyiv (Independence Square) to protest against the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovych's refusal to sign an agreement on Ukraine's associate membership in the EU. The authorities did not respond to the protesters' demands. On the night of November 30 to December 1, when several hundred activists, mainly students, remained on the streets, they were brutally dispersed and beaten by the police at the authorities' command, hoping to intimidate and suppress the protest (this event was called the "bloody dispersal of Maidan"). This violence against students became a catalyst for the second phase of Euromaidan. Police abuses and the brutal suppression of student protests transformed the student movement into a nationwide movement against the dictatorial regime, acting as a spark igniting a powder keg and causing a social explosion. The next morning, videos showing police beatings of students were published not only in Ukraine but also worldwide; a barrage of criticism fell on the authorities, including from the European Union, NATO, the UN, clergy of various confessions, and international NGOs. Ukrainian citizens rose up against the oppressive government (Shveda, Park, 2016).

In response to the brutal abuses of power and violations of human dignity, the next day hundreds of thousands of outraged Ukrainians gathered in the center of Kyiv, and demonstrations also took place in other cities across Ukraine. In this way, Euromaidan became the Revolution of Dignity: a manifestation of support for the European trajectory of development and opposition to usurpation of power, corruption, policies of Russification, and alignment with Russia. Ukrainians also demanded punishment for those responsible for the brutal dispersal of Maidan and the severe beatings of its participants. After the beating of students, protests continued until the end of February 2014; despite assaults on barricades, beatings, and abductions by security forces, millions of people joined the demonstrations. According to official data, during the Revolution of Dignity, 107 people were killed. Most of them died from gunshot wounds as a result of mass shootings by security forces on February 20, 2014. Symbolically, they were called the heroes of the "Heavenly Hundred." It was a tragic price for overthrowing the dictatorial regime, removing the pro-Russian president (Yanukovych fled to Russia), forcing the government to resign, and holding new democratic elections and confirming the European direction of further development (Barsukova, 2021). The process of European integration for many Ukrainians marked not only a geostrategic path of progress for their country but also hope for a change in the "rules of the game," which would bring about modernization of economic and political life. Yanukovych's attempt to withdraw from the process of European integration meant the collapse of these hopes, igniting the flame of the Ukrainian revolution (Shveda, Park, 2016).

In the history of Central and Eastern European countries, the Ukrainian Euromaidan was the longest protest in recent times (lasting a full 92 days) and the largest pro-Europe-

an demonstration. For comparison, in 1989, the demonstrations leading to the overthrow of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia lasted 42 days, while the anti-communist revolution in Romania, which ended with the execution of Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu, lasted 11 days.

The Revolution of Dignity opened up the prospect for significant changes in Ukraine – processes of decommunization, the development of civil society, which was expressed with a powerful voice on the Maidan through numerous civic initiatives and volunteer movements for the construction of the army and the defense of the state, as well as further processes of transforming the post-totalitarian society into a democratic one (*Revolyutsiya*…, 2023).

Key dates in Ukraine's further path to the EU:
- 03.2014 – after the Revolution of Dignity – signing of the political part of the Association Agreement;
- 06.2014 – signing of the economic part of the Agreement;
- 09.2014 – ratification of the Association Agreement between Ukraine and the EU;
- 12.2014 – commencement of the EU Advisory Commission's activities in Ukraine;
- 01.2016 – entry into force of the Comprehensive Free Trade Area between Ukraine and the EU;
- 06.2017 – full entry into force of the Association Agreement between the EU and Ukraine;
- 09.2017 – commencement of visa-free travel for Ukrainians to the EU;
- 10.2021 – Common Aviation Area Agreement (CAA);
- 03.2022 – amid the war, Ukraine joined the integrated energy system of continental Europe ahead of schedule (after the war, Ukraine and Europe will have new opportunities for joint development of energy markets and support for the "green transformation");
- 06.2022 – Ukraine obtained candidate status for EU membership, which was a powerful geopolitical message of support for Ukraine from the European community (Ministerstvo…, 2024).

The experience of Ukraine's European integration amidst war conditions is unique. By safeguarding the eastern flank of the EU and NATO against Russian military intervention, and enduring enormous human, financial, and economic losses, the country has acquired candidate status for EU membership. Ukraine continues pro-European reforms in various sectors, deepens sectoral cooperation with EU authorities, and implements the provisions of the Association Agreement in practice, along with recommendations from the European Commission (*Yevrointehratsiya*…, 2023).

The war unleashed by Russia has accelerated Ukraine's European integration processes by helping to unite the nation, strengthen solidarity between Ukraine and the EU, and consolidate EU countries in their collective opposition to Kremlin aggression. However, it must be acknowledged that Russia's aggression complicates the processes of European integration because Ukraine has suffered immense human and economic losses and must allocate significant resources to counter Russian intervention.

Ukraine has lost hundreds of thousands of active participants in public and political life, those who could and wanted to contribute to its development – they were the first to

go to the front lines to defend their Homeland and many of them were killed or maimed. In these extremely difficult circumstances, political support, military and humanitarian assistance, financial aid from USA and EU countries are critically important for Ukraine. The Western sanctions policy, coordinated with other countries, is also an effective tool in confronting Russia's aggressive actions.

The European mental test, or the main aspects of Ukraine's kinship with Europe

Mentality is a socio-cultural phenomenon that constitutes a collection of historically shaped worldview characteristics (and patterns of its transformations) of a given community (nation) in a general sense, as well as its individual representatives in a specific sense. It encompasses images and ideas based on axiological orientation systems and historically formed patterns of behavior and characteristics of practical activity. Since the methods of practical activity and creativity are unique to each nation, it is precisely these, combined with other factors, that create its unique paradigmatic psychological characteristic ("mental composition") during its existence from the furthest past to modern times. It reflects the general set of characteristics of the spiritual world of the nation and the social groups constituting it (Hordiichuk, 2021, p. 81). In this sense, the mentality of each nation is specific and unique.

The main component of mentality, or, in other words, its core, are archetypes – ancient authentic values, collective ideas that have been shaped and embedded in people's minds for centuries throughout their existence. Archetypes are fundamental concepts of the spiritual life of society and, at a subconscious level, influence worldview and understanding of the world. Determinants of the emergence and perpetuation of archetypes include numerous factors, including the geographical location of the community that becomes a nation (natural and climatic conditions, way of life, characteristics of economic activity, interaction with neighboring ethnic groups, etc.), and historical events through which the community passes: experience of victories and defeats, survival and prosperity, etc.

The concept of archetypes was developed by C. G. Jung. He defined archetypes as symbolic patterns of the "collective unconscious", correlates of instincts, certain "archaic mythological images" that are immutable for all times and cultures and cannot be rationally understood in a discursive way. According to Jung, the complex of archetypes, built on the experiences of past generations, forms the basis of spiritual life, where consciousness and unconsciousness interact and complement each other (*History of philosophy…*, 2006, p. 969). Archetypes manifest themselves in the form of images and symbols, thus through language, folk art, customs, traditions, beliefs, etc., through which access to unconscious patterns is transmitted from generation to generation. In this way, archetypes provide continuity between generations and the integrity of ethnic culture. Studying the archetypes of a specific nation allows us to formulate an objective view of its mentality.

The main archetypes of the Ukrainian mentality are Earth and Freedom. They are typical for an agrarian society: for hardworking, open, friendly, non-aggressive, romantic, gentle, joyful people. Therefore, these archetypes influenced the formation of such

traits of Ukrainians as emotionality and sensuality, the central position of feelings, individualism, dreaminess and lyricism, submission to fate, etc. (Hordiichuk, 2018).

The oldest state "ancestors" of Ukraine, Kyivan Rus' and the Principality of Galicia-Volhynia, had close economic, cultural, and spiritual ties with medieval Europe. A vivid example of this is Prince Yaroslav Mudryi, who was a renowned "matchmaker of Europe." He inscribed himself in the history of this part of the world through his effective foreign policy, mainly through the marriages of his children to representatives of the highest authorities of several European countries, as well as wise internal policies (development of education and culture, creation of legal codes, etc.). Yaroslav Mudryi was married to the daughter of the King of Sweden, Ingigerd. Their daughters married European kings and princes. Anna became the wife of King Henry I of France, Anastasia married the Hungarian King Andrew I, Elizabeth – the Norwegian Prince Harald Hardrada. As for the sons, Vladimir was married to the Polish princess Gertrude, Sviatopolk – to the Austrian princess Oda, the wife of Vladimir was a Greek princess, and the wife of Yuri – a German one (Hrushevsky, 1991).

Parts of Ukrainian territories since the 14th century were under the rule of first the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, then the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and finally Austria-Hungary, which attracted Ukrainians to the social and political values and orders of these European countries. This allowed them to receive European education and spread contemporary ideas in Ukrainian lands, mainly in its western parts. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Ruthenian nobility had the same status as the Polish nobility, which was associated with many privileges and possibilities (Nagielski, 2010, p. 56). The introduction of Magdeburg law in Ukrainian cities contributed to the Europeanization of city life, the establishment of an elected system of local government and courts, the formation of the foundations of civil society in Ukraine, and made it possible to bring city life into clearer legal norms (Kyrychenko, 2011, p. 364). However, this primarily concerned areas located along the Dnieper River (such as Kyiv) and west of it. The Left-Bank (eastern) Ukraine from the 16th century until the collapse of the USSR was under greater or lesser influence of Russian state entities, which had significant consequences and qualitatively different impact on the Ukrainian mentality.

Russian historians, rewriting history at the behest of their own political masters, assigned Ukraine the unassuming position of the younger brother of the great Russian nation. The renowned Ukrainian historian, public figure, and politician, M. Hrushevsky, justifying the uniqueness and originality of Ukrainian history since the time of Kyivan Rus', repeatedly pointed out that there is a huge historical, cultural, and psychological gap between the Ukrainian and Muscovite (Russian) peoples, which can only be overlooked by those blinded by the influence of Russian propaganda. Ukrainians are historically a nation of Western culture, although there are also visible Eastern influences among them. Russians, on the other hand, represent an oriental spirit with a distinct Asian influence, while also undergoing some degree of Europeanization. However, through the efforts of representatives of Russia, who were instructed to act "with a fox's tail and a wolf's tooth," starting from the 19th century Ukraine was detached from the West and Europe and directed towards the north and east. As a result, it "got stuck in the dead end of the great Russian culture and life," and "the whole Ukrainian life was torn from its normal conditions, historically and geographically

formed path, and subjected to the Russian Empire for exploitation and plunder" (Hrushevsky, 1991, pp. 141–144).

Hrushevsky emphasized the spiritual and characterological similarity of Ukrainians to representatives of Western European civilization. For example, the former exhibit a high level of self-esteem and respect for the dignity of others, an inclination towards certain established forms and laws, cultural and social values, etiquette, and good manners, as well as a love for cleanliness, order, and the beauty of life. They resemble, on the one hand, Germans with their solidity, diligence, love for comfort, order, cleanliness, abundance, balance, and stoicism, and on the other hand, representatives of Romance culture, with their desire to beautify everything and their joyful and bright outlook on life (Hrushevsky, 1991, p. 147). The inclination of the Ukrainian people towards Western culture is natural and based on internal mental agreement. It cannot be achieved through coercion and pressure. This is evident in the works of Ukrainian intellectuals who visited both European countries and Russia, allowing them to compare and understand the essence, causes, and consequences of such differences. For example, V. Lypynskyj wrote in his "Letters to the Peasant Brothers" that creative elements in Ukrainian culture penetrated it from Europe, not from Asia, and that the whole of Ukraine, as a state-national movement, is a child of European culture. This scholar pointed out the strong ties between Ukraine and Poland and defined the West as the mother of Ukraine, arguing that Ukrainians should "cut the umbilical cord from their mother: the West and Poland," to "separate from Poland, but in a way that does not drown in the Russian sea" (Lypynsky, 2010, p. 115).

Populist slogans and promises proclaimed by Russia and pro-Russian circles have always been directed at uneducated, gullible citizens of Ukraine who desired quick and easy improvement of their material conditions. The Russian government physically destroyed the Ukrainian intelligentsia. After each attempt to establish Ukrainian statehood, power in Ukraine was deceitfully seized by the Russians. The first historical example could be the situation that occurred in the 17th century after the uprising of Bohdan Khmelnytsky. Although It was the latter who, due to the unresolved war with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, sought himself protection from Moscow (1654), this protection theoretically was not supposed to lead to the submission of Ukrainian lands to Russia. However, in the end, partly as a result of Moscow's machinations, this did happen a few years later. In the 1920s, Ukraine's chance for its own statehood was lost again as the communists treacherously seized state power. In 2014, exploiting the political crisis in Ukraine (which actually had its main cause in Ukraine's return to a European course), Russia shamelessly intervened again and since then has conducted direct and information warfare on Ukrainian territories, posing a threat to Ukrainian statehood. On February 24, 2022, Russia attacked the entire territory of Ukraine, massively destroying Ukrainian cities and villages.

Understanding historical traditions, social ties and similarities in mentality that connect Ukraine with Western European civilization, has been the subject of research by the contemporary Ukrainian philosopher, S. Krymsky. According to this scholar, there are grounds to claim the existence of a European context for the formation of the Ukrainian nation (Krymsky, 2004, p. 518). In particular, he noted that if we adopt a socio-cultural understanding of the concept of "Europe," it is based on three fundamental phenomena:

antiquity, Christianity, and enlightenment. At the same time, antiquity is understood in the context of its reflection in the Renaissance, Christianity in the context of the Reformation, and enlightenment in the context of further development of social and scientific progress as well as democracy. European lifestyle has three levels: quality of life, standards of living (quantitative indicators), and lifestyle. At the heart of contemporary European consciousness lies the issue of liberal democracy. Moreover, democracy in the civilized world is understood not in terms of criteria arising from the opinion of the majority, but as guaranteeing the rights of minorities, and more broadly – human rights, individual rights (Krymsky, 2004, p. 512). One of the most important components of "Europeanness" is the priority of individual rights over the rights of the state.

In summary, detailed research by scholars on the issue of Ukrainian mentality and the results of sociological studies allow us to distinguish such characteristic features of the Ukrainian mentality that make it similar to the mentality of Western nations: love of freedom, individualism, and a constant desire for democracy, as opposed to the despotism and authoritarianism of Russia.

Ukrainian love for freedom is an intriguing phenomenon because it represents a rejection of externally imposed authority, a desire for individuality by maintaining distance from society, reliance on one's own strength, abilities, and understanding, as well as initiative. However, this characteristic, in terms of its historical manifestations and role, is ambivalent. It was primarily evident in family environments, and only in recent decades has Ukraine become an area of significant growth in the number of socially active figures and the characteristic mode of operation of a civil society. A specific feature of Ukrainian love for freedom (which also makes it very similar to Polish) is that only during times of deep social crises and upheavals does it lead to a transformation from a state of *vita minima* (existence in seclusion, avoiding close contact with the world and engagement in its affairs) to *vita maxima et heroica* (Cossack-like reaction: complete mobilization of spiritual and material resources, heroic resistance even at the cost of one's own life) (Hrabovska, 2000, p. 9). This transformation is at the core of today's defense of Ukraine, which the whole world watches with admiration. The events in Ukrainian history in the 21st century have forced the entire world to talk about Ukraine, its path to democracy, distinguished it from other post-Soviet states, and shown a striking contrast to Russian reality.

The individualism of Ukrainians is reflected in the well-known phrase of the great Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko: "Everyone has his own destiny and his own broad path." However, currently, adhering to this principle is more harmful than helpful for Ukrainians. Similar to the previously mentioned characteristic of love for freedom, historically, the interests and sphere of influence (agency) of Ukrainians have been limited for centuries to their immediate family. In the current situation, it is important to realize belonging to the state and the necessity of multidirectional cooperation, personal responsibility, and one's own contribution to building the desired model of public administration. This would help in the fight against the enormous level of corruption, which unfortunately Ukrainian society has allowed due to its overly loyal and tolerant approach. It is a sobering fact that not all Ukrainians understand and support the European system of values. Unlike Europeans, the average Ukrainian allows himself to break the law because he considers it "unjust". Meanwhile, for the majority

of Europeans, the main principle is: *Dura lex, sed lex* ("The law is harsh, but it is the law") (Safaryans, 2019, p. 345).

The centuries-long influence of Russia has brought destructive transformations to the Ukrainian mentality, starting from the 17th century up to the present day. The most harmful role for the mental foundations of national existence was played by the introduction of communist ideology and the fight against all manifestations of Ukrainian identity: the prohibition of the Ukrainian language and culture, the imposition of atheism. The consequences were so destructive and profound that they still hinder the active development of Ukrainian society, lowering the level of initiative due to often unconscious reluctance to take an active stance in life and career building. In the Soviet reality, this posed a threat to the lives of entire families and large social groups (more Hordiichuk, 2019).

During the implementation of social reforms, it is necessary to take into account the specificity of the historical development of different regions of Ukraine, and consequently, the worldview and global relations in these areas. Because Ukrainian lands were under the rule of different states, and the population was under the influence of informational propaganda, which resulted in a very low level of critical thinking, before the outbreak of full-scale war, Ukrainians could be conditionally divided into three geopolitical camps, which significantly differed in values: those supporting focus on the EU, those seeking a return to the sphere of Russian influence, and the neutral (undecided or indifferent). The number of members of the second and third camps significantly decreased in favor of the first after Russia's aggression on February 24, 2022.

The values of the first, "European" camp (mainly the population of Western and Central Ukraine) were shaped, as mentioned earlier, under the influence of European countries that historically encompassed Ukrainian territories, especially Poland and Austria-Hungary. As a result, this camp emphasized many values shared with modern European countries, such as freedom and equality, citizenship and justice, respect for human beings and their rights, religiosity and religious pluralism, tolerance, and industriousness. It should be noted that the population of each country in the European community primarily focuses on its own national values, which can vary significantly depending on regional, cultural, historical, etc., characteristics (for example, northern countries more strongly support Protestant values, while southern countries – Catholic ones).

The so-called "Russian" camp comprises parts of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, which for a long time were part of the Russian Empire and have a significantly smaller percentage of native Ukrainian population. The population mainly uses the Russian language, and older generations often have nostalgic feelings towards the USSR. These sentiments are regularly and intensively fueled by lies spread by Russian media, armies of bots on social media, pro-Russian collaborators, and saboteurs, etc. In this way, Moscow's occupation and communism introduced a foreign civilization to Ukrainian territory: Russification and the annihilation of everything Ukrainian, expropriation of private property, collectivization of villages, famine, mass repression, destruction of the genetic pool, etc. All of this had a destructive impact on the mentality of the Ukrainian nation as a whole, and – to put it briefly – on its southeastern part in particular.

In the Soviet Union, the rights and freedoms of citizens, their spirituality, were disregarded, and instead, state-imposed atheism, pseudo-justice, flattery, paternalism, degradation, the psychology of slavery, careerism, poverty, corruption, smuggling, and so

on prevailed. Informing on others was considered patriotism. Kindness, mercy, decency, and industriousness were replaced by "class vigilance" and "communist morality", generating fear, mistrust, anxiety, cunningness, deepening the internal alienation of the nation. As a result of these largely top-down (by USSR and its collaborators) controlled processes, Ukrainians acquired a range of mental characteristics that have slowed down the progress of Ukrainian society since the Soviet era: irresponsibility and passivity, decreasing ability to assimilate new ideas and make independent decisions; a psychology based on survival allowing for the acceptance of "lesser evil" and "just to avoid worse"; adaptability and betrayal, a minority complex and "secondary nature," which generates distrust in Ukraine's successful development.

Research conducted over more than 20 years among Ukrainians has shown that the number of supporters of European integration in Ukraine is gradually increasing, as is the shaping and strengthening of civil society. Focus on Russia was popular among residents of Ukraine in the early 2000s. However, the year 2004 was a turning point. After the Orange Revolution, the number of those supporting accession to the EU surpassed supporters of closer ties with Russia. In 2004, this number was around 40%, in 2006 – 43.7%, and in 2011 – already 46%. In December 2013, the number of supporters of EU accession fluctuated between 48 and 49%. After the Revolution of Dignity, support among Ukrainians for EU accession sharply increased to 61% (*V Ukrayini*…, 2014).

Comparative data on the opinions of Poles regarding Ukraine's accession to the EU provide interesting insights. Dominant attitudes include: strong support for swift accession and willingness of accession but without haste (opposing opinions and lack of opinions are at most a few percent). In the years 2013–2014, the latter prevailed (by about 30%), with a few percent change in favor of the former between these two years. In 2014, Polish supporters of Ukraine's slow accession to the EU were 47%, roughly the same as the number of people supporting accession in Ukraine on the eve of the Revolution of Dignity. Russia's full-scale aggression significantly changed this situation: in two surveys conducted in 2022 (in March and July), the former opinion gained support of around 60 and 52%, while the latter received 30 and 36% (CBOS, 2022, p. 4). Slightly less than a year later (March 2023), these proportions changed slightly, but in terms of the overall trend, they remained the same (49:34%) (CBOS, 2023, p. 5).

According to the results of the All-Ukrainian Sociological Survey conducted by the Center for Social Analysis and Research (CISR) of the International Republican Institute (IRI) in March 2021, 54% of Ukrainians supported Ukraine's focus on Europe, while around 20% supported accession to the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (*Suspil'-no-politychni…*, 2021, p. 53).

From May 10 to 21, 2023, the International Sociology Institute in Kyiv conducted a survey across Ukraine, excluding temporarily occupied territories. According to its results, 92% of Ukrainians want Ukraine to become a member of the EU, and 89% want it to become a member of NATO (*Pidtrymka*…, 2023).

Currently, Ukrainian society is facing a difficult challenge – the largest military invasion by Russia since World War II, defending independence and democratic values, rights, and freedoms at the cost of thousands of lives, expressing strong and unified support for integration with the EU and NATO.

It is worth emphasizing that such support for European/democratic values is not co-erced, rhetorical, or strategically adopted to ensure Western support for Ukraine. **It stems from an understanding of historical lessons and the current geopolitical situation.**

One dimension of the internal policy of the Ukrainian state that indicates this is the decentralization reform launched in 2014. It was positively received by society and proved to be expedient and effective. It strengthened local self-government, increased powers and resources, and led to their more appropriate use. It also created united territorial communities, among other achievements. The decentralization of power brings Ukraine closer to the EU by introducing the principles of subsidiarity and fostering local democracy within the framework of multi-level governance in a unitary decentralized state (Romanova, Umland, 2021). At the outset of Russia's full-scale military invasion, the horizontal system of governance had a significant positive effect: community leaders did not wait for instructions from above but were able to act autonomously to protect their territories. Currently, the citizens of Ukraine are defending their right to live in their own Homeland, protecting a democratic and independent Ukraine, realizing that only joining a friendly community of European countries guarantees its existence, protecting its values and freedoms. European integration is perceived in Ukraine as a necessary means of preserving national identity, thereby becoming an objectively important element of the national idea, capable of uniting the multi-ethnic Ukrainian society, which is necessary to overcome external and internal enemies (Rafalskyi, 2016; Chekalenko, 2022; Svyrydenko, Revin, 2023).

Ukraine's accession to the European political community as an equal partner has the potential to bring the spirit of renewal to the Old Europe (Kostiushko, Halchenko, 2022, p. 161). It should be added that Ukraine's accession to the EU will allow Europeans to see with satisfaction how much we have in common. We have already mentioned such European-like mental traits of Ukrainians as love for freedom, individualism, and a constant desire for democracy. At the same time, Ukrainians are energetic and diligent, emotional and sincere, they respect traditions and are open to change. Of course, it is precisely these characteristic traits of the Ukrainian mentality that have historically enabled the preservation and revival of the Ukrainian nation. And it is these traits that will help us move forward and become a developed European country. Ukrainians are fighting for their state, for the right to life and free development. They hope that joining the EU will help overcome corruption and make the whole society feel what it means to live in a country where legal status is not only written in laws but is actually implemented.

Conclusions

Despite Ukraine's independence for over 30 years, the question of the European vector of development at the all-Ukrainian level was ultimately resolved during the Revolution of Dignity (2013–2014) and in connection with the Russian war in Ukraine, making other options impossible. This is largely due to Ukraine's centuries-long subjugation and significant influence by various states, resulting in a unique blend of the dominant Western (European) civilization and significant Eastern (Russian, Asian) influences, within which various worldview paradigms and value systems coexist. Because mentality

serves as a sort of cultural code of civilization, a comparative analysis of the mentalities of different civilizations allows us to determine which civilization is closer to Ukrainians – Western or Eastern. The more deeply we analyze the spiritual world of Ukrainians, the more similarities we find to European civilization. The pro-European orientation of Ukraine's development represents a challenging yet promising path that requires enormous efforts from both the government and society, restructuring of people's consciousness and lifestyle, ensuring individual responsibility and freedom, democratization of the state, and modernization of society and the economy. Characteristics of the mentality acquired by Ukrainians in the past have significantly influenced the construction of social interactions and communication, shaping values, determining preferences and priorities, as well as processes of integration with the European community. Ukrainian society, after severe social shocks and thousands of casualties due to Russian genocide, realized that a European attitude is not only a chance to preserve Ukraine's sovereignty but also its independence and identity.

Ukraine applied for EU membership on February 28, 2022, the fifth day of the full-scale Russian invasion. May 18 and June 23, 2022, are very important dates for Ukraine. It was then that President V. Zelensky submitted a completed EU membership questionnaire to the Head of the EU Delegation to Ukraine, Matti Maasikas. The accession process typically takes many years but has already begun. Despite ongoing anti-Ukrainian lobbying from Russia, the majority of European citizens are mentally prepared to accept Ukrainians into the larger European family, with some even physically welcoming Ukrainian refugees into their homes. Ukrainians received confirmation of this in June 2023 when the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling for Ukraine to be granted candidate status for EU membership, thereby confirming its integral belonging to the European civilizational family, stemming from history, geographical location, economic and cultural ties. Ukraine's accession to the EU fully aligns with the fundamental mental principles and national interests of Ukraine on the path to progress and transformation into a developed, modern state and political nation.

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Competing interests: The authors have declared that no competing interests exist

(**Sprzeczne interesy**: Autorzy oświadczyli, że nie istnieją żadne sprzeczne interesy)

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Polityczne i mentalne aspekty integracji Ukrainy z Europą

Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł badawczy jest poświęcony drodze Ukrainy do wspólnoty państw europejskich. W okresie od X do XII wieku Ukraina – wówczas Ruś Kijowska – była silnym samodzielnym państwem, jednak w wyniku sporów wewnętrznych oraz podbojów została osłabiona i stała się lennem lub częścią innych jednostek państwowych. Od XVII w. w wyniku ugód perejesławskich (1654 i 1659) pomiędzy kozakami i Moskwą, znalazła się w orbicie coraz silniejszego wpływu Rosji, pod którym pozostała aż do rozpadu najgorszego i najbardziej destrukcyjnego dla ukraińskiej państwowości „więzienia narodów", to znaczy ZSRR. Pod wpływem rosyjskiej propagandy świat przez długi czas postrzegał Ukrainę jako integralną część Rosji, mającą z nią wiele wspólnego pod względem historii i kultury. Jednak w rzeczywistości współczesna Ukraina i Rosja to dwa różne kraje o zróżnicowanych systemach politycznych, wektorach rozwoju, tożsamości, mentalności, fundamentalnych wartościach, tradycjach itp. Społeczeństwo ukraińskie, jakkolwiek w czasach komunistycznych poddawane konsekwentnej sowietyzacji, a po upadku ZSRR będące obiektem działań politycznych i propagandowych Federacji Rosyjskiej, jest fundamentalnym przeciwieństwem autorytarnego społeczeństwa rosyjskiego. Pozo-

staje natomiast zbliżone do demokratycznej społeczności europejskiej. Od wieków władze rosyjskie dążyły do kolonizacji i wykorzystania Ukrainy (Ukraińców i ziem ukraińskich) w swoich własnych interesach: niszczyły ukraińską tożsamość i mentalność, zakazywały języka i tradycji, zabijały liderów politycznych i działaczy patriotycznych, przepisywały i przypisywały sobie wielką historię Ukrainy (szczególnie czasy Rusi Kijowskiej), osiągnięcia intelektualne, zasoby itp. Jednak pomimo rusyfikacji, licznych manipulacji i zbrodni popełnionych przeciwko narodowi ukraińskiemu, Rosja nie zdołała go w pełni zasymilować. To właśnie europejski, zachodni wektor rozwoju Ukrainy i jej dążenie do wyjścia ze strefy wpływów Rosji jest jednym z głównych powodów obecnej pełnoskalowej wojny. Największe podobieństwa między Ukrainą a państwami europejskimi na poziomie mentalności to ukraińska miłość do wolności, indywidualizm i pragnienie demokracji w przeciwieństwie do rosyjskiego despotyzmu i autorytaryzmu. Te specyficzne cechy ukraińskiej mentalności umożliwiły historyczne zachowanie i ożywienie narodu ukraińskiego, pomagają w dalszym rozwoju i dają Ukrainie nadzieję na jej dalszy rozwój nie tylko pod względem geograficznym i ekonomicznym, ale także mentalnym czy duchowym.

Słowa kluczowe: procesy integracji europejskiej, Europa, Ukraina, mentalność, cywilizacja europejska, cywilizacja eurazjatycka, europejski system wartości, tożsamość narodowa