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ASSERTION OF UKRAINIAN NATIONAL AND CIVIC IDENTITY IN DE-OCCUPIED TERRITORIES IN THE POST-WAR PERIOD

National and civic identity in the context of regional conflicts shaping the contemporary geopolitical agenda constitutes primary targets of informational and other hybrid effects. For Ukraine, which has been resisting russian aggression since 2014 and a full-scale defensive war since 2022, European integration has become not only a strategic vector of foreign policy but also a catalyst for the transformation of its citizens' identity.

National identity is understood as a set of cultural, historical, and ethnic elements that shape a sense of belonging to the Ukrainian nation, whereas civic

identity emphasizes political, legal, and democratic aspects associated with the state and its institutions. These two components are not polarized; rather, they are complementary, particularly in the context of European integration, which offers a model of civic nationalism oriented toward diversity and joint values [3].

According to the Law of Ukraine «On the Fundamental Principles of State Policy in the Sphere of Assertion of Ukrainian National and Civic Identity» of 13 December 2022 No. 2834-IX, national identity is defined as a stable awareness by a citizen of belonging to the Ukrainian nation, while civic identity is defined as awareness of belonging to a political community regardless of ethnic origin [3].

Historically, Ukrainian identity was formed under the colonial domination of the Russian Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and later within the Soviet Union, where the ethnic and cultural peculiarities of Ukrainians were frequently suppressed. After achieving the independence in 1991, the nation-building process gained new impetus, culminating in the Revolution of Dignity, when millions of Ukrainians went out on the central square in support of European values: democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. The events of so called «Euromaidan» strengthened civic identity, where Ukraine perceived as a homeland irrespective of ethnic origin, while ethnic identities remained relatively stable [2; 9, c. 76].

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation in 2022 significantly increased the salience of national identity, rendering it more resilient and more drastic [1]. According to a survey conducted by the Razumkov Centre Sociological Service (6–12 June 2024), national and European identities have strengthened: 84 % of Ukrainians believe that a single national identity exists; 91 % are proud of Ukrainian citizenship (with regional variations ranging from 95 % in the West to 83 % in the East); and the proportion of those identifying themselves as Europeans has reached approximately 49 % [7].

At the same time, the armed conflict has generated polarization, between «those here» and «those there» (those who remained in Ukraine versus those who left), as well as between frontline and more distant communities. In domestic discourse, national identity predominates as a measure of the «authenticity» of being Ukrainian, whereas civic identity becomes particularly salient in relation to Ukrainians abroad, especially those who relocated to the Russian Federation and are subjected to policies aimed at erasing associations with Ukraine (passportization, oath, etc.).

Among refugees, strong national identity and pride positively correlate with intentions to return. According to the data from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (as of 2025), more than 5.7 million Ukrainians are seeking protection abroad, with 57 % of refugees and 69 % of internally displaced persons expressing an intention to return. Key determinants include security, housing, and employment; integration in EU countries (access to the labor market and education) reduces the likelihood of return, particularly among highly qualified individuals [5].

European integration functions as a strategic resource for overcoming these challenges by promoting a model of civic identity grounded in shared democratic principles. As of the end of 2025, Ukraine has achieved progress in accession

negotiations with the European Union, having received approved negotiating positions for all six clusters, and the updated free trade regime entered into force in October 2025. Public support for EU membership exceeds 70 %, and identification with Europe strengthens civic unity by contrasting it with russian authoritarianism [2].

The de-occupied territories (parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, and Kharkiv regions, and potentially Crimea) present a particular challenge. During the occupation, russia systematically erased Ukrainian identity through forced passportization, the rewriting of history, prohibition of language and culture, militarization of education, and related measures. In 2025, «patriotic education» programs targeting children continued, leading to psychological trauma [1]. In November 2025, Vladimir Putin signed the Strategy of State National Policy of the russian federation until 2036, aimed at fostering a «russian civic identity» in annexed regions, with the goal of achieving 95 % identification as «russians» [8].

In the post-war period (with de-occupation projected for 2026–2028), reintegration will require a comprehensive approach. Law No. 2834-IX and the State Program for the Assertion of Identity until 2028 (Cabinet of Ministers Resolution of 30 July 2024) define the principles of national-patriotic education, civic education, and the reintegration of territorial communities [3; 4]. Particular emphasis is placed on strengthening the implementation of Ukrainian-language usage and the promotion of Ukrainian culture in educational institutions in de-occupied territories. The Ukrainian language is being restored as the only language of the educational process in schools and higher education institutions; immersion programs in Ukrainian culture, history, and literature are being introduced; textbooks are being updated; and courses of national-patriotic education and extracurricular activities focused on Ukrainian identity are being developed.

At the same time, civil servants appointed to public office in these territories are required to demonstrate proficiency in the state language at an advanced level (not lower than C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Certification is granted through a certificate issued by the National Commission on State Language Standards or through relevant educational degree. These measures aim at the rapid restoration of Ukrainian linguistic and cultural predominance, overcoming the consequences of «russification», and strengthening the national and civic identity of the population.

The Strategy for the de-occupation and reintegration of Crimea (Presidential Decree No. 117/2021) emphasizes the protection of the rights of indigenous peoples, and the restoration of culture, education, and the economy [6]. Initiatives include mental health programs («Return»), child rescue initiatives (Bring Kids Back UA), distance education, prohibition of propaganda, and documentation of crimes.

Thus, European integration constitutes a key tool for asserting Ukrainian national and civic identity, transforming the challenges of war into opportunities for unity. The present moment requires a balance between de-russification and inclusion, while the post-war period requires policies of reconciliation, refugee return, and the implementation of European standards. Only through dialogue,

education, and reform Ukraine will be able to construct a resilient identity that harmonizes ethnic heritage with civic patriotism.

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