The Influence of the European Identity Crisis on the European Union Foreign Policy Towards the Post-Soviet States

Abstract: The paper raises the issue of the European identity crisis and its influence on the European Union foreign policy towards the Post-soviet states. The author examines the prospects of introducing to the European citizens' consciousness the feeling of belonging to the united supranational society. The article claims that today the potential of forming the European identity has exhausted itself and that the European political elites should come up with new solutions to the problem of European identity crisis. The author aims to consider the influence of the European identity crisis on the EU foreign policy towards six Post-soviet states (Ukraine, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus and Georgia) within the framework of the program “Eastern Partnership”. The paper proves that due to the European identity crisis the EU has lost much of its ‘ideological appeal’ and is no more an ideal model of the socio-cultural integration for the above mentioned Post-soviet states.

Key words: European identity crisis, European Union foreign policy, Post-soviet states.

The essence of the European identity crisis

Formation of a collective European identity, which implies a profound change in the public consciousness, as opposed to the political and economic integration of Europe that took a relatively short period of time, is a long process. At its core, European identity is a fact of awareness by the Europeans of the feeling of dual identity, which blends a sense of belonging to his/her home country and to Europe as a whole. For the first time in the history of the EU the
decision about the formation of a supranational European identity feeling among the citizens of the member states of the European Union was adopted by the heads of states of the European Community in June 1984 at the EC summit in Fontainebleau. Since that summit many policy initiatives were designed to help achieve this goal. There have been established a Europe flag, anthem, a common holiday "Day of Europe" (5 and 9 May). Residents of the states that have acceded to the Schengen Agreement of 1985 began to enjoy a visa-free regime. In 18 countries there was introduced a single currency - the euro. Residents of the EU countries were granted the status of "citizen of the EU". Within the EU, the Europeans got the so-called "four economic freedoms" - freedom of movement of persons, capital, services and goods. As conceived by the European politicians, the civic unity of Europeans based on the feeling of belonging to the united Europe should have become a condition of strength and political unity within the EU and, as a consequence, the key to success of the whole integration project.

However, the idea of creating a common identity among more than 500 million people living in 28 European Union countries with different histories, cultures, traditions, living standards, seems very ambitious and despite the measures taken so far it remains far from being properly implemented. The majority of the population of the EU member states still experiences a strong sense of national identity. Moreover, the proportion of citizens that think so does not decrease, but instead increases. In 1994, on average 33% of respondents considered themselves only as citizens of their home country, by 2013, in spite of all the efforts of supporters of the pan-European project, this figure had risen to 37% (Eurobaromètre Standard 79, 2013, p. 23). As for those who consider themselves both citizens of their country and the citizens of Europe, in their minds, a component of "national identity" retains a dominant role. While in 1993 46% of Europeans identified themselves primarily as French, Germans, Italians, Spaniards, etc., and only
secondarily - as Europeans, in 2013 this figure rose to 49% (Eurobaromètre Standard 79, 2013, p. 27). The prevalence of the national identity component is most characteristic of the citizens of the countries that relatively recently joined the EU. However, this same sense is characteristic of the citizens of some "old" members of a united Europe as well. Thus, according to statistics, in 2013 the largest number of Europeans that preferred the national identity to the pan-European identity lived in Greece (56% of all respondents in this country), Cyprus (55%), the UK (51%), Bulgaria (51 %), Italy (47%), Czech Republic (45%), Romania (43%), Latvia (43%), Hungary (41%), the Netherlands (39%) and France (38%). At the same time, most Europeans that identify themselves as citizens of a united Europe (Eng. - European citizens), in 2013 lived in Luxembourg (88% of all respondents in this country), Malta (81%), Slovakia (76%), Germany (73%), Finland (73%), Denmark (71%), Belgium (71%), Poland (70%) and Estonia (70%).

Based on the age structure of the population of EU member states, we can say that in 2013 people from 15 to 24 years (68% of all respondents in all EU countries) and from 25 to 39 years (65%) felt most “European”. People of older generations, 61% aged 40 to 54 years and 56% aged 55 years and older, felt least “European” (Eurobaromètre Standard 79, 2013, p. 24). In general, the process of introduction into the mass consciousness of a sense of belonging to some supranational European community is relatively slow and unsuccessful. The vast majority of people in Europe still perceive this idea as alien to their mindset. According to the statistical report of the European Commission of 2013, only 46% of Europeans were familiar with the pan-European civil rights and obligations, while 53% were not familiar, and 1% did not know of their existence (Eurobaromètre Standard 79, 2013, p . 36).
**What are the causes of the European identity crisis?**

The main cause of this crisis is that the term "European identity" is quite blur (Lom, Murillo, 2002, p. 317). On the one hand, it is unclear in which proportions an average citizen should combine a sense of national and European identities and how a pan-European identity should be built so that none of these feelings was dominant. On the other hand, it is not clear what it means to be European. Some politicians argue that Europeans are citizens of EU member states. However, this definition does not include the citizens of the European countries that are formally non-EU countries, such as Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Liechtenstein. The application of the geographical criterion does not clarify the issue of where Europe begins and where it ends, and consequently who should be called Europeans.

Inability to define the essence of the European community through formal (political and geographical) criteria puts forward the criteria of cultural and civilizational values. The commonality of cultural and civilizational values suggests the presence in Europe of common religious, cultural and political traditions and a commitment to European humanistic and democratic values. However, this approach to the definition of the European identity is also very ambiguous for the interpretation of this phenomenon. On the basis of the current reality, we can conclude that the religious community in Europe built on Christian values is rather weak and cannot serve as the key component of European identity. Such a failure of religion can be explained by several reasons. First of all, the spread of Christianity is not limited to the European habitat: a commitment to Christian values and symbols is common to many non-European nations. In addition, there is a growing secularization of citizens of EU member states. On average, no more than 20% of Europeans surveyed say that religion is important to them (Pew research center, 2012). Moreover, most notably the process of secularization mainly occurs in the
so-called "old" European countries. In Spain religion is important only for 22% of the population, in Germany - for 21%, in the UK - for 17%, and France - for 13%. In the Scandinavian countries, this figure does not exceed 8%. Finally, the typical trend of recent decades is the progressive loss of the religious homogeneity of Europe and the overwhelming predominance of the adherents of the Catholic and Protestant faiths. If we follow this logic, it turns out that the citizens of Greece, Bulgaria and Romania, for which the main denomination is Orthodox Christianity are excluded from the European Community. Outside the European community remain millions of adherents of Islam, which now account to an increasing proportion of the population of Europe and are European citizens.

Like the Christian religion, humanistic and democratic values also cannot determine the specificity and the distinctive character of the European identity (De Beus, 2001, p. 283). In reality, the European political values that are often heralded as one of the major common values of the European community are characteristic not only of Europe but also of the whole Western civilization. Europe's commitment to democracy and the rule of law, considered as the main element of its social and cultural identity, is now no longer a unique European design. With the proliferation in the XVIII-XX century of the European system of values, philosophical and legal ideals to other regions of the world, Europe lost its globally unique political identity. In the second half of the twentieth century dichotomy on a "we-they" principle was based on the confrontation between the capitalist West and the communist East. Dominant elements of the modern European identity combine anti-Islamic and anti-American sentiments. Scientists view differently this trend. Some consider it as a positive development and the first step to the construction of a European identity. Others draw attention to its destructive potential.
The prospects of building a common European identity on the basis of cultural community of European nations are also rather vague. Some historians argue that one of the founding fathers of the European Community, Jean Monnet shortly before his death admitted that if he had the opportunity to start anew the process of European integration, he would start with the culture (Weinstein, 2009, p. 129). Culture is indeed of particular importance for the approval of public integrity and cohesion. Within the EU, the construction of a cultural community is complicated by the fact that European culture, on the one hand, should be clear and close to each resident of any European country, and on the other - it should not ignore the national identity of European national cultures. Proponents of the European cultural community see cultural pluralism in Europe as "unity in diversity". However, they stress out that all Europeans must be committed to the common humanitarian values such as freedom, respect for individual rights, the rule of law, tolerance, social justice. All these elements could theoretically contribute to the unity of the peoples of Europe, but at the same time they contain a certain potential of disintegration. The problem is that common European identity erodes persistent national identities that rest on a unique historical experience of individual countries, on their unique national symbols, national mythology and cultural values. Moreover, many of the components that make up national European cultures contain historical memory of ethnic conflicts and wars of the past.

Cultural diversity in Europe today is often expressed in the presence of cultural incompatibility, mutual alienation and hostility of the various nations and ethnic groups to each other. One of the sources of the conflict is the increasing number of EU states. Accession of the new states to the EU is perceived by a significant part of the European population as one of the obstacles to the process of formation of a common European identity. Another difficulty of
forming a common European identity is the increasing number of immigrants from African and Asian countries (Boswell, 2000, p. 537). Mass immigration leads to fundamental changes in the ethnic structure of the EU member states and to the cultural identity transformation of the EU member states. Immigrants who come to Europe in search of a better life often refuse to integrate into the European cultural space. The emergence in Europe of numerous immigrants from non-Western societies with different mentality values seriously complicates the process of formation of a common European identity. There is a huge need for a more rigid and strong integration into the European community of anti-Western values and standards of behavior.

Another impediment to the successful formation of a common European identity is the linguistic fragmentation of Europe's population. 24 languages are recognized as official languages of the EU. According to statistics, currently the most widely spoken native language in the EU is German (spoken by 16% of the EU population), followed by Italian (13%), English (13%), French (12%), Spanish (8%) and Poland (8%) (Special Eurobarometer 386, 2012, p. 5). The knowledge of foreign languages among Europeans gradually improves, but nonetheless we still cannot speak about the emergence of a "multilingual European". On average, only 54% of citizens of the EU member states know one foreign language at a conversational level, 25% can maintain a dialogue in two foreign languages, 10% - in three. The most popular languages that Europeans prefer to study as foreign languages are English (38%), French (12%), German (11%), Spanish (7%) and Russian (5%). However, in different countries the situation with knowledge of languages is very distinctive. The largest percentage of the population with the knowledge of foreign languages is observed in countries such as Luxembourg (98% of the population speak at least one foreign language), Latvia (95%), the Netherlands (94%), Malta (93%), Slovenia (92%), Lithuania (92%) and Sweden (91%) (Special Eurobarometer 386, 2012,
Historically, in Luxembourg, Latvia, Lithuania and Malta there was no dominance of a single language, so people in these countries as a foreign language most often learn the second, "unofficial" national language. No wonder that in Lithuania and Latvia, the most common foreign language is Russian, in Luxembourg - German and in Malta - English. In the Netherlands and Sweden the study of foreign languages, especially English, is common due to the advantageous geopolitical location of these countries and the focus of their national economies on the international trade. In turn, the worst situation with the knowledge of foreign languages is observed in Hungary (65% do not know any foreign language), Italy (62%), the UK (61%), Portugal (61%) and Ireland (60%) (Special Eurobarometer 386, 2012, p. 5). The current state of linguistic fragmentation of Europe prevents the formation of the common European culture.

Thus, the prospects of forming a common European identity are pretty pessimistic. There is still no public consensus about what the European identity is. Today the potential of forming the European identity has exhausted itself and that the European political elites should come up with new solutions to the problem of European identity crisis.

**The influence of the European identity crisis on the European Union foreign policy towards the post-Soviet states**

The EU relations with the former Soviet countries that are officially included in the so-called program "Eastern Partnership" are of particular interest in the context of the crisis of European identity. "Eastern Partnership" is a specific dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Founded in May 2009 at the Prague Summit, "Eastern Partnership" is aimed at accelerating political association and deeper economic integration between the EU and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.
Belarus is a member of the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan established in 2010. Ideologically and culturally Belarus is completely focused on deepening cooperation with Russia. Historically, Belarusians and Russian share common cultural values, traditions and the mentality. However, according to statistics, the most important argument for the Belarusian-Russian partnership is not the value-cultural argument, but pragmatic economic considerations. From 2010 to 2012 the economic motive for cooperation with Russians has increased in Belarus from 55.1% to 72.9%. Overall, more than half of Belarusians favor integration with Russia. Of these, 49.3% support the idea of free trade zone, 30.4% favor a single economic space without political union, and 6.3% agree on the accession of Belarus to Russia in the form of an autonomous republic. At the same time only 15% of Belarusians favor improving relations with the EU. 86.2% of Belarusians do not know anything about the EU program "Eastern Partnership", 95.4% have never heard of the other EU initiative - "Dialogue on modernization of Belarus", which was launched in 2012 (Korsak, 2013). In the EU politicians claim that today's European foreign policy towards Belarus is ineffective because it is not able to bring into this post-Soviet country Western Christian democratic values, eliminate corruption and protect human rights and freedoms. For this reason, EU officials discuss the need to resort to more serious and decisive steps towards the regime of Alexander Lukashenko, including the usage of economic and political sanctions. The prospects of deepening of cultural integration between Europe and Belarus are very questionable. EU is more interested in preserving stability of EU-Belorussian relations and keeping the relative cultural proximity with Belarus due to the fact that Belarus borders are very close to the EU and Belarus is a transit country between Russia and the EU. Furthermore, since the Belarusian authorities openly declare their interest in cooperation and integration with Russia, not with the EU, Brussels cannot benefit from the
"ideological" pressure on Minsk. European identity crisis worsens even more the EU perspective on the distribution of its values and cultural influence on Belarus. Minsk, in turn, uses the EU identity crisis to justify its rigid domestic and foreign policies and to support deeper integration with Russia and other post-Soviet countries.

Azerbaijan, as well as Belarus, does not seek to establish close relations with the EU, which criticizes Baku for disrespect of human rights and lack of democracy in this post-Soviet country. In this respect the reaction of European politicians to the predictable outcome of the presidential election on October 9, 2013, in which the incumbent president Ilham Aliyev was re-elected for another term, is very obvious. Brussels authorities have said that the elections included a huge number of violations and that they do not reflect the real political will of the citizens of Azerbaijan. Baku, however, does not agree with the negative reaction of the EU and is not going to review the outcome of the presidential election. Despite the existence of values and cultural differences between Europe and Azerbaijan, for the EU it is unprofitable to spoil relations with the Caspian oil-rich state. First, Baku remains an important logistics center for the West in the implementation of Afghan transit. Secondly, the prospects of implementing mutual energy projects condemn Azerbaijan and the European Union to close and long-term cooperation. At the same time European politicians want from Azerbaijan to expand the boundaries of democracy, improve the situation with human rights and freedoms, follow the policy of reform and modernization. Baku does not like such an assertive rhetoric (IA REX, 2013). Due to its favorable geopolitical location Azerbaijan has the opportunity to "play by its own rules" and develop closer cooperation with Turkey and Russia, rather than EU. Turkey, as well as Azerbaijan is a Muslim country. It is interested in Azerbaijan's oil resources and is ready, without preconditions, to cooperate with the Azerbaijani government. Russia also bypasses the
value-cultural dialogue and hopes that Azerbaijan will soon join the Customs Union. Availability of alternative allies around the borders allows the Azerbaijani authorities to choose the most suitable options for international cooperation without changing the current political situation inside the country. Baku is unlikely to respond to the criticism of the EU and to radically change its ideological, humanitarian and political beliefs and traditions.

Armenia and the EU are currently looking for new forms of cooperation. Despite the fact that Armenia continues to participate in the EU program "Eastern Partnership", its relationship with Europe remains mixed. On the one hand, Brussels demands from Yerevan to establish in Armenia the European model of democracy and put end to corruption. On the other hand, it remains unclear whether these transformations will be economically and socially beneficial for the Armenian state. Notwithstanding, cooperation between Yerevan and Moscow seems more promising. Russia is the leading foreign trade partner of Armenia with a share of 23.5% in foreign trade balance. Russian investment exceeds 50% of the total investments in the Armenian economy (Bagdasarian, 2013). Moreover, Russia is ready to guarantee the military security of Armenia without going into the cultural values dialogue. The bilateral Russian-Armenian cooperation in the defense sphere led to the establishment of the effective security system, which allows to maintain the status quo in this highly sensitive region and ensures the most peaceful development of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict region between Armenia and Azerbaijan. EU is not ready to cooperate with Armenia in the security sphere, if Armenia does not go to the cultural rapprochement with Europe and will not honor the European political values and standards. Armenia, in turn, will never agree to join the European security system under the auspices of NATO, because this organization includes Turkey - one of the main enemies and geopolitical rivals of Armenia.
Relations between Ukraine and the EU are quite mixed. Europe believes that Ukraine could be a potential member of the European integration, but in order to become a member Brussels demands from Kiev to fulfill several conditions: liberalize the economy, eliminate corruption, make politics more transparent and competitive. Since the former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych took office, relations between Ukraine and the EU seriously deteriorated in terms of cultural values. The destabilization of the relations was caused by the arrest of several leaders of the Ukrainian opposition, including Yulia Tymoshenko, the introduction of protectionist measures on certain domestic Ukrainian markets (introduction of a special customs duty on cars and revision of the WTO tariffs), the suppression of political demonstrations in Kiev after the 2010 presidential election. Ukrainians themselves relate differently to the "Europeanization" of their country. According to sociological studies, 41.6% of Ukrainians support the integration of Ukraine into the European Union, while 34.7% support Ukraine's accession to the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. 15% of Ukrainian citizens do not support either the Customs Union or EU. About 8.7% of the respondents have difficulties with defining what direction of integration Ukraine should choose. 88.1% of Ukrainians have a positive attitude to the simplification of visa regime between Ukraine and the EU, and only 5.7% are against this measure. As statistics show, many Ukrainians (74.8%) never visited any European country, only 23.7% have at least once been to the EU (UKRinfom, 2013). On the basis of the results of the statistical and sociological research, we can conclude that Ukraine is still undecided about the direction of cultural integration. Most probably the country will stay divided in its value preferences. The Eastern part of Ukraine is more pro-Russian and the Western part is more pro-European.
Georgia, unlike Ukraine, is clearly aimed at rapprochement with the EU. In Georgia there is a very strong pro-European sentiment and natural political development pushes Georgia to the West. After the Russian-Georgian war of 2008 Tbilisi finally became convinced of the correctness of the chosen pro-Western course. Nevertheless, one cannot say that the EU is ready to deepen cooperation with Georgia without the preconditions of humanitarian and civilizational character. For example, on 24 October 2013 foreign ministers of Sweden and Poland visited Tbilisi (Lebanidze, 2013). The main purpose of Carl Bildt and Rodoslav Sikorski’s visit was to convince the prime minister of Georgia Bidzina Ivanishvili to stop repression against former officials of the administration of the former president Mikhail Saakashvili. European diplomats admitted in the conversation with their Georgian colleagues that if the arrests of the former officials continue, this process could jeopardize further rapprochement between Georgia and the EU. President Ivanishvili affirmed that Georgia, despite the pressure from the EU, is going to culturally integrate with the EU.

The cultural relationship between the EU and Moldova lost most promising within the program "Eastern Partnership". In recent years Moldova have liberalized its economy, largely adapted its culture to the European humanitarian values and political standards. In June 2013 Chisinau and Brussels reached the agreement about the establishment of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area between the EU and Moldova (Paholnitsky, 2013). The zone of deep and comprehensive free trade involves the gradual liberalization of trade, free movement of labor, reduction of customs tariffs, technical and non-tariff barriers, the abolition of quantitative restrictions and harmonization of Moldovan legislation with the European one. Agreement has not yet passed all the legislative stages in the European Parliament, but it is assumed that the contract will be signed shortly. In addition, Moldova is aimed at the introduction of the EU-
Moldova visa-free regime. Brussels supports this initiative. It is expected that in the near future the EU will gradually simplify the visa regime with Moldova. At the same time EU is not ready for its complete abolition. Cancellation of visa regime could enhance the integration of Moldova with the EU. The success of humanitarian cooperation between Moldova and Europe can be explained by the fact that Chisinau itself without external pressure and without direct references to the EU adapts its values to the European standards and is committed in cultural and civilizational terms to become part of the united Europe. However, Moldova cannot ignore the opinion of the Kremlin, which is not satisfied with the prospects of deep cooperation of the former Soviet republic with its rival for integration - the European Union. Chisinau is heavily dependent on Russian energy resources and financial assistance from Moscow. Russia considers the convergence of Moldova and the EU as a strategic defeat and the loss of its geopolitical influence in this part of the former Soviet space. Moscow also fears that Moldova could follow the example of other former Soviet republics, namely Ukraine and Georgia, which to this or that extent are interested in closer relations with the EU.

All in all, the political scenario which involves close cultural cooperation of former post-Soviet states with the EU includes three preconditions: Europe must stop be completely dependent on the Russian energy resources, former post-Soviet states must adapt their political values and cultures to the European standards, the EU must overcome the crisis of the European identity. In the short run, this development seems to be impossible. However, in the long run cultural rapprochement with the above conditions may take place.
References


