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The influence regional and local identity in the European political process

In the article the problem of the regional political identity, its types, structure, conditions of formation were discovered. There was analyzed the influence of the regional identity on the political processes in the countries of Europe.

Keywords: regional problem, regional situation, regional identity, regionalism, political process.

Вплив регіональної та локальної ідентичностей на європейський політичний процес

У статті досліджено проблему регіональної політичної ідентичності, її типи, структуру, передумови формування. Проаналізовано вплив регіональної ідентичності на політичні процеси в країнах Європи.

Ключові слова: регіональна проблема, регіональна ситуація, регіональна ідентичність, регіоналізм, політичний процес.

Wpływ tożsamości regionalnych i lokalnych w europejskim procesie politycznym

W artykule przedstawiono problem regionalnej tożsamości politycznej, jej rodzaje, struktury, warunków tworzenia. Wpływ tożsamości regionalnej w procesie politycznym w Europie.

Słowa kluczowe: problemy regionalne, sytuacji w regionie, tożsamość regionalna, regionalizm, proces polityczny.

Social contradictions of modern society, the uncertainty of social situations, a variety of principles of organization of social communities, activities, social roles and group norms are reflected in the consciousness of the various population groups. In this regard, notes the

transformation of the established values of social categories by which people define themselves and their place in society. Thus, the identity crisis observed not only at the level of individual consciousness, but also within a given social space. Regional identity becomes a condition for structuring territorial communities, the most important factor in the reproduction of social solidarity at the level of social groups and thus influences the development of the region, so that revealed the need to explain the factors and trends strengthen regional identity and its mobilization potential.

The need to explore regional identity phenomenon is especially significant is updated in an environment where one of the consequences of the transformation of society becomes regionalization space, accompanied by a sharp increase in the regional identity.

The recent turbulent political events in the country calls to encourage the researches of the problems of regionalism and regional specifics of some individual areas and their inhabitants. The current civilizational fault of Ukraine calls to pursue the substantial reevaluation of social values and logically involves the analysis of spiritual, socio-cultural and historical roots of all regions of our country.

The country regional development process identifies for the particular attention and this is the obvious fact. To select an effective strategy of action and the appropriate political, socio-economical and other instruments it's necessary to clearly identify the main issues, the nature of the regional problem.

In general, it is possible as follows:

Firstly, how to change the proclaiming constitutional equality of the state subjects, equality of «de jure» into the equality of socio-economical living conditions of equality «de facto»? How to define the principles of this «equality» correctly?

Secondly, how, not declaratively, but really for the common good, to use a strong development capability, confined exactly in the differences of Ukrainian territories? How to put into practice the native dream and the imperative – «the unity in diversity»?

Thirdly, how to find a consistent combination of common national, governmental, regional and personal human interests in the today's difficult situation and to do it in the most accurate way and without any conflicts?

Thus, a regional problem is a systemic manifestation of an imbalance in the functioning (state, development) of one or more interdependent potential areas. Among the regional problems there can also be attributed still rare manifestations of «growth points» which need special attention.

It should be noted the conceptual and methodological differences between the concept of regional problem and regional situation.

The regional situations are more inertial than the regional problems occurring on their backgrounds. The last ones are a set of specific regional conflicts that have arisen in the course

of the regional situations development. The regional problem should be realized as something manageable (ordering, mitigation, etc.) in the foreseeable future.

The regional problem, in principle, cannot be solved once and forever, but its sharpness should be minimized with the help of a regional strategy – a system of measures on the territorial structure of society effects for the sake of public interest objectives.

The regional problem can conditionally be divided into three parts:

1. socio-economical issues (regional policy in its traditional sense);
2. political issues (decentralization, federalism);
3. cultural issues (regionalism).

These components largely have different nature, and the measures of reduce of the severity of each of the regional problems aspects have to be different. Different tasks should be solved by methods adequate to these aspects. It is better to avoid the crossing and the imposition of these methods, i.e. for example the solutions of economic goals with the help of social measures.

One of the political regional problem in Ukraine is a problem of regional identity and regional political culture.

The regional and local identifications serve as one of the defining and stabilizing (albeit difficult being isolated) factors in the formation of cultural-historical and socio-territorial community. From the perspective of Charles Rick, «a factor of regional identity is «national» statement of the regional collective, a «voice of a regional group»¹. The regional identity seems to be possible to consider as an option of ethnic or rather sub-ethnic identity. The importance of the regional identity has at least two political consequences. Firstly, it is difficult to implement a strategy of ethno-political mobilization of society. Secondly, it makes the regional identities an important political resource, which, in its turn, can jeopardize the unity of the country.

The conservation and sustainability of the regional identity can be explained through the concept of «internal colonialism» by M. Hatcher. He understands it as «the existence inherent to a particular culture, hierarchy division of labor, which contributes to the formation of reactive groups»², so «the internal colonialism» is a form of exploitation of the Center of its periphery. Spatially the irregular waves of industrialization in the era of the modern increased the marginalization of many peripheral (provincial) territories, and ultimately contributed to the regional stratification and spatio-territorial hierarchy of society. This factor, according to M. Hatcher, contributes to the preservation of ethnic and regional identity in the certain territories (sometimes in a latent form), despite all the attempts of the Center to unify the cultural property. In addition, as some researchers note, the prevalence of local political loyalty above the national is typical for the societies with fragmented political culture and transit political periods.

¹ Рик Ш. Феномен идентичности, Образование и социальное развитие региона, 1996, № 3-4. – с. 212.

² Hatcher M., Levi M. *Ethno-Regional Movements in the West*, Oxford, NY, 1994, p.185.

The changes in the organization of space (country or region) as a consequence have got changes of the collective representations of it, which inevitably leads to the disruption of identity, the creation of its new variation, the return to the traditional forms, or even to the «loss» of identity. The revival of the old and the formation of the new regional myths and ideologies, noted by researchers, reflect the process of updating of the citizens regional self-identity in the circumstances of identity crisis and it is a defensive reaction to changes in the very unfavorable changes in the socio-political environment, with which our country had to face.

Regional identities, such as national, are based on the idea of «imagined communities» according to the words of B. Anderson. However, if Anderson saw nations as closed systems, on the contrary, the regions should be regarded as the opened ones. The regional identity can be regarded as a key element of the region construction as a socio-political space and institutional system. Note, that the regional identities do not replace or supersede the national ones, in most cases they are complementary and constitute not a system of rigid, mandatory, but rather unstable and flexible connections.

The maintaining of the regional identity may require a constant threat from outside; this binary logic of «we» and «they» can give a regional identity even an aggressive character because «we» is defined, in particular, through the opposition to «them», to the «other». Thus, according to G. Delanty, «the purity and stability of «us» is guaranteed primarily by the common name, then by the demonization of other / another and getting rid of them»³[4, p. 47-62]. Maintaining of the purity requires the designing of the hard, impenetrable boundaries, and since it is impossible, the process of fragmentation of regional communities and blurring of the regional identities develops.

As P. Frankenberg and J. Shubauer note, the regional identity comprises the three main elements. The first element is the cognitive, it points that the citizens should be made aware of the existence of their region and its geographical limits. This, in its turn, it requires some knowledge about the region and the neighboring regions, in order to «own» the region can be easily distinguished from «other». The region's population must know about some of its characteristics, whether it is physical and geographical features, a special story or an economical profile.

The second element of regional identity is affirmative, it is a form of interpretation of the cognitive element and it includes a set of emotions about the own region as well as the extent to which the region provides a frameworks for the common emotions and solidarity feelings. The affirmative and cognitive elements of identity associated with the third element – the instrumental, when the region is used as a basis for the social and political mobilization and for the collective action. The instrumental element can be considered as the highest element in the sense that it evolves on the basis of the first two: the cognitive and the affirmative. The instrumental

³ Косов Ю. В., Фокина В. В. Политическая регионалистика, СПб.: Питер, 2009, с. 47-48.

identity element is manifested in a particular political culture of the population (especially in the electoral culture), but even more in the design of regional parties and movements ⁴.

This way, it can be argued that the political regionalism can be defined as the expression of regional political culture prevailing in the power of the instrumental aspect of regional identity development.

The problems of regionalism are now in the center of attention in many countries. Such, already in 1998, the European Parliament, taking into consideration the acuteness of these problems, adopted a “Charter of regionalism”, according to which the region is understood as a homogeneous space having physical and geographical, ethnical, cultural, linguistic community, as well as the commonness of economic structures and common historical destiny. Thus, the declaration of a kind of a set of areas in the region is possible only if the all or a part of the above symptoms exist.

Moreover, in the structure of regional social identity, there are two main components: the knowledge, understanding of the peculiarities of the own “territorial” group and the self-awareness as its member as well as assessing of the quality of the own territory, its importance in the global and the local coordinate system. For the totality of the population, joined, at least, by a common place of living, it means the emergence of some kind of the regional community. That follows that for the regional identity it is the fundamentally important concept, this is an idea about the territorial connections arising on the basis of a joint or a neighbor’s residence of the members of social groups of different sizes and diverse cultural identity. Since the quality of a region can be different, and its properties and functions are not always comparable to those of other regions, it serves mainly as a collective image that embodies the economic and political phenomena in their specific content in the relation to the conditions of functioning of the public relations.

Currently, it is possible to clearly argue that the geopolitical factors have an increasing impact on the processes taking place in a given country, including Ukraine. Accordingly, these factors impact on the change of regional relations, and with the development of globalization processes this impact becomes more and more significant.

According to E. Eremina, it should be clearly distinguish the concepts of internal and external identification: in the case of the external identification of the region, it can be defined as the process of recognition and attribution of the regional identity from the outside (in a broader social space), while the inner essence of the identification lies in the self-reflexive establishing and awarding by the entity (by the local inhabitants) the own social properties and characteristics of the region (historical, political, economic, cultural, and so on). The ambient (objective) world defines the inner world of the subject ⁵.

⁴ Frankenberg P., Schulbauer J. *Raumbezogene Identitaet in der Geographic*, Mannheim, 1994, p. 35.

⁵ Еремина Е. Региональная идентичность в контексте социологического анализа. *Регионалистика*, 2011, № 3, <http://regionsar.ru/node/781?page=26.04.2016>

The founder of the theory of the social identity A. Tajfel wrote that the social measures impact on the individual way of seeing the world by the subject. The self-identity, expressed primarily by the identification itself with the community, is the subjective, resultant, based on the objectively existing features of the identification with this community. This applies to any of the components of the social identity, particularly to the regional ⁶.

The regional identity can serve the basis for a special perception of the common national political problems, which expresses in a particular electoral behavior during the national elections and referendums. The politicization of the regional identity can go further, leading to the formation of the regional party-political systems.

At certain stages of social development of the power structures of the state are interested in the emergence of a regional identity, which is becoming a social reality is the following:

- achievements socio-political integrity of the regional community,
- fixed problem of mobilization of society and state,
- saves continuity of public (regional) development.

The greatest interest in this regard is the Soviet experience in the construction of a regional identity. The attitude to this phenomenon of social reality in representatives of the highest authorities of the Soviet state passed the evolution of total rejection and combat this phenomenon to initiate and stimulate the process of its formation within the boundaries of the dominant Soviet identity. Thus, the formation of regional identity in the conditions of Soviet reality takes on the character of purposeful activity of authorities of different levels.

Analyzing the problem of construction of social reality in the direction of formation of regional identity, it is necessary to point out that form the identity of the means to create the social and conceptual space for it.

In a stable society with a sustainable national (civil) identity the regional identity does not come to the fore in the hierarchy of the territorial identities. In the normal circumstances, it is manifested in the formation of a certain system of values and norms of the region inhabitants' behavior due to ethnicity. In the conditions of the weakening or the crisis of the national (civil) identity the regional-ethnic identity can make it competition and after receiving a political connotation, jeopardize the unity of the country.

The regional identity can take shape under the influence of pressure of socio-economic nature, i.e. can be rooted in the inter-regional disparities in the levels of socio-economic development. It is important to note that in this case the political demands can nominate as relatively prosperous regions, using the argument of dependency from the side of the poorer regions, and, on the other hand, relatively poor regions: in this case, using the argument of insufficient attention by the center, the discontent of their policies.

⁶ Иванова Н.А., Румянцева Т.В. Социальная идентичность: теория и практика, Москва, 2009, с. 32.

In the first case as an example may serve the political demands of the macro-region of the Northern Italy and the constitutioning of the regional parties (leagues), in the second case – the regional socio-political movements in the Southern Europe or a special electoral behavior of the population of the Eastern lands of Germany, where the increased support gets the Party of Democratic Socialism. It is noteworthy that in the case of formation of a regional identity with the socio-economic side it could be the strengthening of its negative aspect, it's not inside orientation, but outside, on the search of the «enemy», which can act as poor as rich regions (the lack of inter-regional solidarity) and the National Center as a «producer» of chaos or a source of unmotivated decisions infringing the rights of regions.

Obviously, to divide the cultural and socio-economic prerequisites of the regional identity formation is possible only conditionally, in most cases the speech is about their combination. For example, on Corsica, the folding of a very special identity occurred at the cultural-historical basis, but at the same time, the region is probably the poorest in France, which also strengthens the regional identity, the region's commitment to the self-isolation. Generally, the undefinition on the law level of the regional Corsican identity («natural» and historical), and the presence of an separated «Corsican people» is the constant source of serious internal conflict and a matter of concern all French governments regardless from their political affiliation (both as left as right) . This opposition has a violent expressed character; it has repeatedly led to outbreaks of terrorism (of varying intensity). The attempts as peaceful conflict resolution by providing Corsica a special self-governing or autonomous regional status (socialist governments), as tough repressive methods of suppressing of the radical Corsican nationalism / separatism from the side of right political forces did not succeed; the main obstacle were the positions of the French Constitution, according to which there is only one «nation» – the French, and, accordingly, only one official language throughout the whole country⁷.

The current state of Corsican resistance to the central government is characterized by the division of the nationalist forces into the autonomists and separatists. The second group has always had a militaristic component, resorted to the terrorist acts and felt the violence the only one way to achieve the independence. However, the majority did not support nor autonomist or separatists.

Although the intensity of the armed aggression gradually reduces, the confrontational relations with the central government are still not overcome, as well as the main cause of the conflict – the powerful assimilation pressure on the regional («natural») ethno-cultural identity of Corsicans. That is why the prospects for the further developments of acts and the relevant scenarios are rather pessimistic: they reduce, from the one hand, to the further decline of self-identity of the local population due to the political system of France, from the other - to the lasting resistance of “national-conscious” Corsicans as a permanent source of the conflict⁸.

⁷ Kimmelman M. In Corsica, clinging to a regional identity, The New York Times, 11 November, 2010, <http://www.nytimes.com> [23.04.16]

⁸ Беліцер Н. Регіональна ідентичність і регіональний сепаратизм у сучасній Європі <http://www.ucipr.kiev.ua/publications/regionalna-identichnist-i-regionalnii-separatizm-u-suchasnii-evropi> [20.04.2016]

Note that, according to a number of leading European researchers in the field of regionalism, the presence of a strong regional identity, especially cultural-historical character, in most cases, is not a guarantee for regional «success», the acceleration of the temps of the socio-economic development of the region. The positive experience shows the regions where there is a deliberate general economic interest, and where it is possible to make a choice in the economic policy. In this case, the regional economic interest generates the creation of political institutions which, in their turn, design, produce a regional identity based on the collaboration of actors in the development of common regional interests. The foregoing should be illustrated by the example: the artificial Rhône-Alpes region in France is developing much more successful than the «traditional» rooted regions of the South of Italy, which are not able to construct a political identity and to develop their own effective strategy.

A bright example of the coexistence and, in some extent, the competition among the various levels of identities are «British» and «English». The first one is characterized by attempts to develop a sense of community between different parts of the nation, historically established range of different features. In spite of efforts to consolidate the country (often as a result of the emergence of a common external threat), it has such powerful component, as nostalgia for past greatness of the British Empire.

On the cultural, historical and socio-economic backgrounds of the regional identity the another important factor applies – it is the factor of geography, other words, rather a distance from a central location (the degree of peripheral), rather a sharp distinction between macro-regions of the country, as a rule, the gradient of the North / South, that is inherent for every major country in the distinction between the northern and southern regions (this may be the East / West gradient).

For example, Italy has specific problems related to regionalism. According to constitutional order, Italy is a very decentralized country, which, however, is believed not as a federal, but rather «polycentric». Italy was the first country that resorted to the experiment with the asymmetric decentralization. After the Second World War, the introduction of the high-level regional government was inevitable at least on five areas the most famous of which are Trentino – the South Tyrol and two southern islands - Sicily and Sardinia. In the search of the «third way» between the federal and unitary structures, the regionalization was implemented across all the country, although the level of authority remaining territorial and administrative units lower than in these five ⁹[6, p. 129].

In the context of studies of Italian regional identities, the phenomenon of such a political party/movement as «Northern League (League North, LN), deserves a special attention. The most distinctive feature of LN is not its successful attempt to design a new collective regional identity – the north-eastern Italian ethnic «nations» called «Padania». The purpose of this actually non-existent, fictitious ethnic identity was to get the right to self-determination, i.e., to

⁹ Bilancia P., Palermo F. The European fitness of Italian Regions, Perspectives on Federalism, 2010, Vol. 2, Issue 2, p.129.

legitimize the secession from Italy, or, at least, the acquiring of a high level of autonomy for the region with the same name. That mean, the activity of LN was aimed not only at the individual assertion of the ethnic identity, but also to the fight with the «corrupt central authority» for the federalization and the deprivation of possibility to give the support to the impoverished southern regions, which hamper the further full development «Padania»¹⁰.

Talking about Ukraine, the regional distinction between the East and the West was laid and maintained, forced by those states, which included the parts of our country for a long time. In addition, the situation escalates by such factors as the belonging to the different civilizations (European and Eurasian) and various religious traditions (Catholic and Orthodox). However, we should not be limited by focusing only on the noted regions, because the regional differentiation of Ukraine includes such major areas as the Centre and the South, with have common and different political, economic, cultural features of East and West. It should be noted that the regional differences of Ukraine had been formed before there was a state. There is interdependence of political and regional identities and the impact of the external factors on the formation of the regional identities.

It should be noted that regional identity is fundamentally important idea of territorial connection, which occurs on the basis of joint or neighborhood of residence of members of social groups of various sizes and different cultural identification. In this regard, we can talk about some basic, geographically and historically developed space, the parameters of which are quite stable and weakly amenable to social or political design. These include the geopolitical parameters of the region, its climatic conditions, which determine certain features of culture, traditions and way of life, and especially the organization of the economic infrastructure of the region. These parameters may indicate the presence of the space within which regional identity may occur. Accounting for this basic component is a prerequisite for the effective organization of the social space of any regional identity.

At the same time, the social space of the regional identity can be constructed by regional and social policy of the state.

The possibilities of constructing a regional identity of the social space based on the presence in each region-specific climatic conditions, forming a particular cultural and historical community. By themselves, these conditions may be more or less attractive for the public. The regulation of this process requires the authorities of purposeful activity on formation of an attractive image of the region through an elaborate regional and social policy.

Thus the power of forming a kind of order, which is being implemented, primarily through education, the arts, the media. On the ground, it becomes a priority theme in the local culture.

Geo-cultural, geo-political images and symbols of the region is closely linked to the cultural and historical traditions of a particular territory. In this regard, of particular importance

¹⁰ Бєліщєр Н. Рєгіональна ідєнтичність і рєгіональний сєпаратизм у сучасній Європі <http://www.ucipr.kiev.ua/publications/regionalna-identichnist-i-regionalnii-separatizm-u-suchasnii-evropi> [20.04.2016]

in the development of regional identity is recourse to historical memory. It contains the idea of victories after defeats, greatness after humiliation. It is these deep historical aspects of the sacred beginning to work on the formation of identity. Not casually attempts to form local and regional identities, as, indeed, and the fight against them is related to local history. Regional authorities initiated the creation of local history organizations and studying the history of his native land in educational institutions, stimulate the development of local lore Olympiad movement. Appeal to the history of the region is the most effective method of forming the patriotic feelings that form the basis of regional identity.

Forming the image and appeal to the historical memory associated with a certain myth-making. With the myth of man creates a picture of the world, interpret natural phenomena and social processes in relation to itself and in this sense, myths are created as the man himself, the mass consciousness, and the authorities are part of the identity. On this basis, the crystallization of the collective «we» - the base for the identity of any level and type. Identity is formed in relation to a series of differences that are socially understood. That is why there are relevant political relations, which requires the development of regulating their standards. A fundamental role in these relations plays power ... ». The collective «we», which occurs on the basis of awareness of their peculiarities and differences from others, is the result of a purposeful activity of the local authorities and the awareness of geo-cultural images of the historical past of the region and its social space in the public consciousness. At certain stages of development of the regional identity of the collective «we» can act as resource mobilization, thus artificially cultivated and supported by local authorities.

Such way, the regionalism, understood as a political ideology and strategy of the elites, is aimed at the redistribution of the forces between the «center» and «periphery». In recent decades, the new forms of regional political relations and institutions appear, the construction and interpretation of which is making trough the metaphor of «project approach», in terms of «region-building», «horizontal forms of cooperation between the partners», «flexibility», «networking concept», «decentralization». In the successful regionalization there seen a basis for the institutional embodiment of the political principle of the decentralization (in the case of Ukraine) or federalism. In the center of the «new regionalism» there are such types of areas, where the nation-states are no longer the main and the only actors, which define the rules of the cooperation and the integration. The «Traditional» regionalism was aimed at the solving of clearly defined functional tasks in the areas of the economy or safety. The «new» regionalism is much more multidimensional: it includes both aspects as the economical and the political, as the social and the cultural.