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## **DECOMMUNIZATION OF UKRAINE IN THE CONTEXT OF GENERATION CHANGE**

*- Abstract -*

Ukraine as a sovereign state has been passing a long way of transformations during more than twenty-five years. Given this reason, a study of the peculiarities, which are distinctive for a number of Ukrainian generations in the context of changing societies under the processes of decommunization, is significant. Considering the concept of “generation,” we rely on the “spiritual and historical theory of generations” by Jose Ortega y Gasset, where a “generation” means a specific subject of historical activity dedicated to the political ideas of its time.

The decommunization of Ukraine takes place due to the package of “decommunization laws” adopted in May 2015.

The older generation of Ukrainians remains the bearer of the Soviet identity certain features, which are manifested in the hope of solving the current issues by the new power or from outside (abroad). In contrast, the younger generation embodies a new identity, which core is formed by pragmatism, the freedom to choose beliefs and behavior, and nihilistic attitude to the Soviet period legacy. Basically, Ukraine is characterized by the situation of crisis identity associated with a certain impact of regional particularities. The presence of a substantial part of the Soviet identity bearers in the Ukrainian society does not allow completing the decommunization process.

For this reason, it could take time or even a complete change of generations for the successful process of decommunization to transform the Soviet identity into Ukrainian one.

*Keywords:* Ukraine, decommunization, generation, identity, social transformations, revolution, citizens, elite.

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The study of history facilitates the formation of people's historical consciousness, which naturally combines knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions of social development. Reflected in traditions, rituals, artistic images and theories, it enables mankind to summarize historical experience. Historical consciousness is a part of public consciousness; thus, it bears all the characteristics of the latter. At the same time, historical consciousness has own peculiarities. The subject, which gives basis for historical consciousness, includes a historical reality, historical processes, phenomena, events, and traditions<sup>1</sup>. The question of self-awareness remains significant for the majority of Ukrainians.

Becoming a sovereign state, Ukraine has been developing under the constant transformations during more than twenty-five years. This phenomenon could be explained by the fact that the proclamation of independence has started without thoughtful and clearly specified targets. Moreover, the lack of the Constitution of Ukraine (until 1996), which would have clearly secured nature of the new state, caused some damage as well as the strong influence of communist ideology. In the discussed circumstances, the research of decommunization processes of the Ukrainian's different generations (deprivation of the communist-totalitarian past effects), which have been born after beginning of the era of independence and experienced the process of creating a sovereign Ukrainian state, is substantial.

A purpose of the current research is to define the features that are characteristic for several generations of Ukrainians under society transformation during the decommunization.

In the understanding of the "generation" concept, we rely on the "spiritual-historical theory of generations" by the Spanish philosopher and sociologist Jose Ortega y Gasset, where a generation acts as a certain subject of historical activity, which is devoted to the political ideas of its time. Jose Ortega y Gasset defined 30 years as the term of the generation's activity. "A generation, which has grown under the domination of certain ideas, already has its ideas, inclinations and preferences, gradually enriching the public atmosphere. And, if extreme views are dominant, then the new one will appeal to the reverse, that is, to the restoration ... Those, who really want to create a new socio-political reality, first of all, must take care that the

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<sup>1</sup> D.H. Kravchenko, *Istorychna svidomist: poniattia ta struktura*, "Aktualni filosofski ta kulturolohichni iprobemy suchasnosti. Zbirnyk naukovykh prats", Vypusk 11, 2003, p. 307-308.

miserable stereotypes of the previous historical experience will have been lost in the renewed world”<sup>2</sup>.

The results of studies conducted by the Ilko Kucheriv Democratic Initiatives Foundation together with the Ukrainian Sociology Service (from December 25, 2014, to January 15, 2015) commissioned by the International Center for Policy Studies (ICPS) in eleven regions of Ukraine as well as the package of “decommunization laws” adopted in May 2015, are the core sources of the presented research.

Decommunization of Ukraine takes place in accordance with the Law of Ukraine “On the Condemnation of the Communist and National Socialist (Nazi) Regimes, and Prohibition of Propaganda of Their Symbols,” adopted by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine on April 9, 2015<sup>3</sup>. This law, together with the other three adopted on the same day (“On the Legal Status and Honoring the Memory of Fighters for Ukraine’s Independence in the Twentieth Century,” “On Perpetuation of the Victory over Nazism in World War II of 1939-1945,” “On access to Archives of Repressive Agencies of Totalitarian Communist Regime of 1917-1991”), has the following strategic goals: overcoming the communist heritage in all spheres of public life; justifying the historical gap between modernity and the socialist past; holding a clear line in the public consciousness between the nation and the ruling regime in Soviet times, which tried to destroy or distort the national ideals and values<sup>4</sup>. On May 15, 2015, the laws were signed by the President of Ukraine P. Poroshenko and came into force on May 21.

The government’s decommunization laws, in 2015, became some kind of continuation of the previous decrees by L. Kravchuk (1992), L. Kuchma (2001), and V. Yushchenko (2007), which demanded the removal of monuments of totalitarianism, but did not provide mechanisms for their implementation. Practically, they were ignored, and the presidents did not even insist on their performance.

The current state of the problem is a bit better. However, it also has a number of shortcomings. In some cases, the local self-government bodies only try to imitate the fulfillment of the requirements of the above-mentioned Law avoiding practical changes of the names of settlements, districts, streets, and industrial

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<sup>2</sup> Kh. Orteha-i-Hasset, *Vosstanie mass* [Electronic resource]:

<http://www.libros.am/book/read/id/41066/slug/vosstanie-mass> (accessed on 25.07.2016).

<sup>3</sup> Ukrainy Zakon, *Pro zasudzhennia komunistychnoho ta natsional-sotsialistychnoho (natsyystskoho) totalitarnykh rezhymiv v Ukraini ta zaboronu propahandy yikhnoi symboliky*, “Vidomosti Verkhovnoi Rady”, № 26, 2015, p. 219.

<sup>4</sup> O.M. Lytvynenko, *Problemy dekomunizatsii memorialnoho prostoru Ukrainy* [Electronic resource]: <http://www.niss.gov.ua/content/articles/files/dekomunizasia-1065b> (accessed on 22.05.2017).

objects, while manipulating with a similarity of surnames and an opportunity to give the old name a new meaning. Since, such initiatives have not been revealed earlier, it is obvious that, in such cases, it does not mean honoring the memory of really worthy people and events, but leaving intact the old Soviet place names. The change of the street's name "Gazety Pravda" to the name of the street "Pravda" could be an example of the described approach.

The fact that only 18% of the settlements have been renamed by February 4, 2016, from those that have to be renamed, whereas local councils have had to submit the relevant proposals to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine by November 21, 2015, indicates the existence of passive, but rather massive, resistance to the decommunization process among the Ukrainian population<sup>5</sup>.

Considering that Ukraine has been an independent state for a quarter of a century, it gives rise to a question: "Why?" The answer should be sought in the problem of identity and change of generations.

Ukrainian society consists, mainly, of people, whose identity experiences a complex stage of transformation. Twenty-five years ago, almost everyone felt like a Soviet man, a part of a "big and strong country." Despite the fact that the USSR no longer exists as a state, the phantom sense of belonging to it continues to affect the social awareness of millions of Ukrainian citizens.

In the question of the USSR's collapse, the positive attitude prevails in most regions (88% in Galicia - the highest index); however, the negative outcomes are predominant in the following three regions: Donbas - 70% versus 12%, Slobozhanshchina - 52% versus 31%, and the Dniepr region (Podniprovia) - 49% versus 39%<sup>6</sup>.

The so-called Soviet identity was characteristic for the Ukrainians, who lived in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (the UkrSSR) within the framework of the Soviet Union. Ukrainian researchers at the National Institute for Strategic Studies (the NISS) have identified its following features: passivity of the individual (lack of will to improve own life supplemented by formal activity); a complex of inferiority (a feeling of personal inability due to incompetence and unprofessionalism); unmotivated ambition and rudeness; paternalism (transfer of the private problems' solution to the state power); helplessness (hope of solving problems from the outside)<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup>Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup>*Rezultaty zahalnonatsionalnoho sotsiologichnoho opytuvannia, provedenoho v ramkakh proektu "Zapochatkuvannia natsionalnoho dialohu v Ukraini"* [Electronic resource]: <http://www.libros.am/book/read/id/41066/slug/vosstanie-mass> (accessed on 25.07.2016).

<sup>7</sup>O.D. Boiko, *Istoriia Ukrainy*, Akademydav, 2003, p. 618.

The former citizens of the UkrSSR became nationals of a new state, Ukraine, very fast, but the process of transformation of identity did not take place to the fullest extent. After all, members of Ukrainian society have not, yet, realized themselves as a certain unity. For this reason, such phenomenon as regionalism, which is typical for representatives of different generations, makes a substantial impact instead of consolidation. As a result, the characteristics of the identity of Ukrainians are more revealing not at the national, but at the regional levels (the West-Ukrainian, the East-Ukrainian, and the South-Ukrainian ones).

The absolute majority of Ukrainians (67.5%) consider themselves primarily the citizens of Ukraine; 12% - consider themselves inhabitants of their region, and another 10% - their village or city. Less than 3% of compatriots consider themselves citizens of the former USSR, and only 0.3% of population consider themselves nationals of Russia.

Some regions have a higher level of regional identification. It primarily concerns Donbas and the Southwest (the Zakarpattia and Chernivtsi Oblasts). In Donbas, 38% of inhabitants consider themselves the Ukrainian citizens, 35% - residents of Donbas, 10% - residents of their cities, 9% - "citizens of the world," and 5% - citizens of the USSR (remarkable that only 0.3% of population indicate themselves as the citizens of Russia). In the Southwest, 38% of the population consider themselves primarily citizens of Ukraine, 27% are residents of their cities, 22% are residents of their region, and 6% - "citizens of the world"<sup>8</sup>.

Identical differences among the Ukrainian society give rise to inconsistencies in the political environment, which could be used by various political forces in the struggle for power and, thus, increase the confrontation of citizens, distancing the consolidation processes in Ukrainian society<sup>9</sup>.

The modern Ukrainian young generation is the first one since 1991, which has been formed in the conditions of post-socialism. The study of its identical features is significant for the present because this generation will determine the public opinion in the country in the nearest future.

The generation of 25-35 year-olds tends to reveal their individuality and does not always perceive the traditional values - norms of society in which they live. And, it is characterized by a unique phenomenon of stratification within the very generation. It is understandable, since its earlier part carries certain elements of the Soviet identity, which are manifested in the famous slogan: "Born in the USSR",

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<sup>8</sup> *Rezultaty zahalnonatsionalnoho sotsiologichnoho opytuvannia, provedenoho v ramkakh proektu "Zapochatkuvannia natsionalnoho dialohu v Ukraini"* [Electronic resource]: <http://www.libros.am/book/read/id/41066/slug/vosstanie-mass> (accessed on 25.07.2016).

<sup>9</sup> A.I. Poboehyi, *Mentalitet ukrainskoho suspilstva: vytoky ta suchasnystan*, "Visnyk SevDTU", Vypusk 91: Politolohiia, 2008, p. 40.

and the later one - elements of the Ukrainian identity: "Born in Ukraine". Thus, the representatives of one generation, actually, belong to different mental worlds under the influence of historical events, including the proclamation of independence of Ukraine.

The following factors form a set of characteristic features of the new Ukrainian society's identity establishment:

1. The process takes place not only in changing generations, but in changing political, economic, and social structures as well.

2. Priority is given to borrowing elements of subcultures in Western countries.

3. The nihilistic attitude to the Soviet period legacy leads to the devaluation of the spiritual values of previous generations and complicates the transfer of them to subsequent generations<sup>10</sup>.

The Ukrainian researcher V. Tarasenko rightly highlights: "The present ... Ukrainian society is a very young social formation, which system characteristics establishment is still at the stage of the possibility of their different variants"<sup>11</sup>.

The modern Ukrainian generation was born and raised in the conditions of cardinal collapse of the values system and in the absence of a system of the state socialization institutions. Traditional values of the Soviet period, which include the sense of duty, the priority of state interests in relation to personal ones, patience, and enthusiasm, give way to new values that have come in the context of the market and democratic transformations development. Wealth (material welfare), freedom of choice of beliefs and behavior, and pragmatism are the most significant among them.

The total crisis of Ukrainian society has created a situation of profound ideological disorientation among the younger generation, which more and more often becomes the object of political technologists' manipulating, who represent the interests of specific oligarchic groups and political parties<sup>12</sup>.

The corrupting power (29%), the oligarchs' actions (29%), the Russia's efforts for separation inside Ukraine (25%), manipulation of information through the

<sup>10</sup> O.V. Yaremchuk, *Kulturno-istorychnyi potentsial molodi v umovakh transformatsii suspilstva*, "Visnyk Chernihivskoho derzhavnogo pedahohichnoho universytetu", Vypusk 74, Serii: "Psykhologichni nauky", T. 2, 2009, p. 211-212.

<sup>11</sup> V. Tarasenko, *Kryza sotsialnoho samovyznachennia v Ukraini. Do pytannia pro sotsialnu identyfikatsiiu ukrainskoho suspilstva*, "Viche", № 11, 2000, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> T. Artimonova, *Arkhitektonika tsinnosti suchasnoi ukrainskoi molodi ta studentiv* [Electronic resource]: <http://www.stationline.org.ua/pedagog/85/15283-arxitektonika-cinnostej-suchasno%D1%97-ukra%D1%97nsko%D1%97-molodi-ta-studentiv.html> (accessed on 20.07.2016).

media (24%), and the division of Ukrainians by the political agitation (20%) have been determined as the core factors that could divide the Ukrainians<sup>13</sup>.

The whole situation with different generations of Ukrainians resembles the state of crisis identity, which “leads to the collapse of previously persistent socio-political formations that determine the behavior of people.” Its key features are the followings: mosaic, unsystematic, lack of integrity and stability, and constant variability. The identity of this type appears in situations of a sharp transition from totalitarianism to democracy characterized by the emergence of a number of other social existence forms<sup>14</sup>.

Therefore, the presence of a large part of the Ukrainian society, - the bearers of the Soviet identity (“Born in the USSR”), a certain number of which is still holds power, especially at the local level, - leads to the suspension of the decommunization process pace.

Implementation of the decommunization measures was complicated due to the political situation in Ukraine. Firstly, it was connected with the temporary occupation of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, some districts of Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts (regions). Secondly, the behavior of the local self-government bodies’ representatives was influenced by the election campaign on the eve of the local elections that took place on October 25, 2015. Many representatives of the local self-government tried to avoid “unpopular decisions” (preparation of proposals for new names of settlements), and some of them built the election campaign on such populist slogans as “do not allow renaming.” Contrary to the facts, rumors about the need for citizens to immediately change the documents, in which the old addresses were indicated, and the high cost of the corresponding administrative services were rapidly disseminated. In addition, there was the atmosphere of resistance to any transformation under the pretext of household convenience, “preservation of history” etc.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, such significant historical events as “the Orange Revolution” (2004) (“Pomarancheva revoliutsia”) and “the Revolution of Dignity” (“Revoliutsiia hidnosti”) (2014) clearly indicate that the role of the new generation in Ukrainian society is becoming more and more clear. A well-known Ukrainian

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<sup>13</sup> *Rezultaty zahalnonatsionalnoho sotsiologichnoho opytuvannia, provedenoho v ramkakh proektu “Zapochatkuvannia natsionalnoho dialohu v Ukraini”* [Electronic resource]: <http://www.libros.am/book/read/id/41066/slug/vosstanie-mass> (accessed on 25.07.2016).

<sup>14</sup> S. Khrypko, *Fenomen «kryzovoi mentalnosti» v dukhovnomu prostori Ukrainy* [Electronic resource]: <http://www.religion.in.ua/main/12192-fenomen-krizovoyi-mentalnosti-v-duxovnomu-prostori-ukrayini.html> (accessed on 20.07.2016).

<sup>15</sup> *Dekomunizatsiia nazv naselenykh punktiv ta raioniv Ukrainy: pidstavy, protses, pidsumky* [Electronic resource]: <http://memory.gov.ua/page/dekomunizatsiya-nazv-naselenikh-punktiv-ta-raioniv-ukraini-pidstavi-protses-pidsumki> (accessed on 22.05.2017).

researcher of social transformations in the context of the civilization process A. Halchynskyi noted: "... although, it is too early to draw definitive conclusions, but I am convinced that we have every reason to consider these events as a manifestation of the classical content of the social revolution, which is undoubtedly a logical continuation of the deep social transformations begun in 1991. Finally, goals of 1991 and the goals of 2004 are same-ordered. They have the equal genetics and are connected not only with the establishment of Ukraine as an independent sovereign state, but with radical reorganization of the entire complex of social relations, the integration of our country into the modern civilization development..."<sup>16</sup>. During the Orange Revolution, different generations of Ukrainians realized themselves as the subjects of political activity, free from the phantoms of the repressive-totalitarian system.

In relation to the Revolution of Dignity or "Maidan," positive assessments predominate in most regions (from 94% in Galicia to 51% in the Black Sea region), but in three south-eastern regions (Donbas - 69% vs. 12%, Slobozhanshina - 55% vs. 36%, and the Lower Dnieper region (Nyzhne Podniprovia) - 47% vs. 44%) indicators are predominantly negative<sup>17</sup>.

The Revolution of Dignity has created a significant breakdown at an identical level, having won not only a victory over authoritarianism (the remnant of Soviet identity) and a traditional Ukrainian stereotype "I'm all right Jack" (or "it is no concern of mine"), but also showed the following new features of the young Ukrainian generation: tolerance, aspiration to independence and justice, and self-sacrifice, especially manifested during the Russian-Ukrainian war in the East of Ukraine (ATO).

Historians hoped that the renaming of settlements, streets and squares, the opening of KGB (the Russian-language abbreviation for the State Security Committee) archives would push Ukrainian society to rethink its history that would initiate a dialogue between the generations about the country's future. However, the results are still disappointing, despite the fact that from November 25, 2015, to July 14, 2016, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine has adopted 13 resolutions, which has renamed 987 settlements and 25 districts - 1012 renaming in total<sup>18</sup>. Certain changes

<sup>16</sup> A.V. Halchynskyi, *Pomarancheva revoliutsiia i nova vlada*, Lybid, 2005, p. 5, 37.

<sup>17</sup> *Rezultaty zahalnonatsionalnoho sotsiolohichnoho opytuvannia, provedenoho v ramkakh proektu "Zapochatkuvannia natsionalnoho dialohu v Ukraini"* [Electronic resource]: <http://www.libros.am/book/read/id/41066/slug/vosstanie-mass> (accessed on 25.07.2016).

<sup>18</sup> *Dekomunizatsiia nazv naselenykh punktiv ta raioniv Ukrainy: pidstavy, protses, pidsumky* [Electronic resource]: <http://memory.gov.ua/page/dekomunizatsiya-nazv-naselenikh-punktiv-ta-raioniv-ukraini-pidstavi-protses-pidsumki> (accessed on 22.05.2017).

have taken place, but they have not led to a radical breakdown of the Soviet identity that continues to exist in Ukrainian society.

It is needed time and, perhaps, a complete change of generations to turn the Soviet identity into Ukrainian one under the process of decommunization.

Thus, we tried to consider the process of decommunization in the context of the different generations in Ukraine transformation - from the proclamation of independence to the present. They are characterized by the certain peculiar properties. The older generation remains the bearer of some features of the Soviet identity manifested in the hope of solving all problems by the new government or from the outside. The younger generation is the bearer of a new identity, where pragmatism, freedom of choice of beliefs and behavior, and a nihilistic attitude to the legacy of the Soviet period take on the main place. In general, Ukraine is characterized by a situation of crisis identity, which is associated with a certain influence of regional features.

The presence in the Ukrainian society of a significant part of the Soviet identity carriers does not allow completing the process of decommunization. However, its implementation will help to overcome the stereotypes and prejudices, which impede national consolidation and have become one of the reasons for the burst of separatism.

The Orange Revolution and the Revolution of Dignity have become the milestones for the creation of a new Ukrainian elite based on the following renewed identical foundations: tolerance, desire for freedom and justice, and self-sacrifice. We hope that these characteristics in the context of decommunization processes will become the basis for the nationwide identity formation.

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