

Viktoriya Hryaban **Europeanization in the Ukraine – between national and individual identity politics**

The eastern enlargement of the EU coincides with the political and economic redefinition of the European continent. Not only is the EU's role in world politics changing, but its cultural development has taken on a new dynamic. To a certain extent, the term Europe has become synonymous with the term European Union. New definitions of Europe and the forming of a new European identity regularly lead to controversial debates as soon as the problems of its borders are concerned – be it Turkey, the Ukraine or Croatia. Now that the first Eastern European states have joined the EU, the Ukraine with its 1000 km frontier has become the next »world« beyond this newly defined Europe. However, these official demarcations are never as clear-cut as they seem to be. Generally, Europe and its programme of »Europeanization« are still part of a discourse imagined only within the limits of the EU. That is, European symbols and ideas used beyond EU territory are not really considered as part of the debate.

Today, using the results of field research I have conducted, I would like to consider the process of Europeanization taking place in the Ukraine that is of course outside or beyond the EU. By »Europeanization« of the Ukraine, I mean a complex, multi-layered process which can be described in two inter-related parts. I believe that on the one hand, Europeanization in the Ukraine is a process of cultural, political and economic modernisation with the aim of eventually integrating the Ukraine into the EU. On the other hand, it takes the form of a new kind of »Ukrainization«. The process of Europeanization implies emancipation from pro-soviet political and cultural orientation and from ideological stereotypes. It not only fosters the development of a new »European identity« for Ukrainians, but it also helps dismantle their sense of inferiority: before, Ukrainians were identified with the »Homo Sovieticus«; now they wish to be identified as Europeans.

For many centuries now, the Ukraine has been described in its relationship to the political and cultural centres of Western Europe as »Half-Asia«, a bridge or transition zone between the civilization of the West and the barbarism of the Orient. Etymologically the word Ukraine stems from »Okraina« and means »on the border«. In this context, seeing the Ukraine as a »buffer zone« is not just part of a discussion about Europe and can be found in many different discourses, not just on a »mental map« of the EU.

The current political and economical circumstances have forced the Ukraine to find a temporary solution in the form of vector politics. This is illustrated by a



Picture 1: Conflict between Pro-EU and Pro-NIS camps. Source: <http://www.uceps.org/eng/show/65/>, 02.05.2004.

drawing (Pic.1) which shows a staging of the conflict between Pro-EU and Pro-NIS camps (NIS: Newly Independent States), which could have disastrous consequences. The next picture (Pic.2) shows how the EU's reservations in regard to the Ukraine, combined with pressure from Russia on the other side places the Ukraine in a classic »double bind« situation.

The enlargement of the EU to the East has resulted in isolation for those who live in its new border regions. Ukrainians and inhabitants from the EU border regions have protested against the restrictions on free travel and free trade. In particular, on 1st of May 2004, in Ustiliuk on the Ukrainian-Polish border, the organizations »Young democracies« from Poland and »Nashe delo« from the Ukraine built a model of the Berlin wall out of cardboard which was subsequently symbolically destroyed. The motto was »There is no united Europe without the Ukraine« and Pink Floyd's »The Wall« accompanied the demonstration. The words of a participant of the demonstration, Alina Spak: »The Ukraine is aware of its problems. It is in need of European Union commitment to support integration«, show how the public attitude is situated somewhere between idealized hope and self-critical realism.³

By means of empirical analyses of recent legislation and the mass media, I trace Europeanization as a phenomenon that is initiated both by the authorities and by the Ukrainian citizens themselves. These two groups form two vectors of influence on the nation's cultural space: one that acts from »above« – the influence of state governing structures; and one that acts from »below« – people's private experience. In the following, the term of Europeanization from the »top-down« and »bottom-up« will be used to denote this process. At the end of the nineties, scheduled Europeanization started as part of governmental politics – for example in the form of new laws, the introduction of Europe activity days and special holidays. The main goal of such programs and decrees was to actively involve the Ukrainian population

³ <http://www.korrespondent.net/main/93828>, 02.05.2004.

in the government's strategy of Europeanization.

As an example, I would like to point to Decree No.1433 from the 13th of December 2003. This Decree shows the establishment of the program of Europeanization, and its full title is: »Presidential Decree for a State Program of European and Atlantic integration of the Ukraine 2004-2007«. It requires the following actions: the organization of Info-screens, exhibitions and information centres for European issues; the publication of the quarterly bulletin »Euro Inform«; creating chairs of »European integration« at the universities; further education on Europe for civil servants and teachers. Private and regional media are required to concentrate on EU topics in special rubrics. The

best schoolbooks about Europe are awarded prizes. Pupils are encouraged to take part in the annual competitions »knowledge about Europe«. The »Club of international friendship« (KID), founded under the Soviets, has been renamed »European Club« and is now aimed at fostering contacts between students in the Ukraine and the EU.⁴

As I have already mentioned, the new order of identity and cultural belonging have also been introduced by initiating official actions and holidays. In 2003 the celebration »Europe Day« took place only in Kiev and Lviv,⁵ but by 2005 already festivals such as »Europe Week« and »Europe Day in the Middle of



Picture 2: The EU'S reservation towards the Ukrainian EU-membership. Source: <http://www.uceps.org/eng/print/66/>.

⁴ Presidential Decree for a State Program of European and Atlantic integration of the Ukraine 2004-2007 No.1433 from the 13th of December 2003.

⁵ Compare <http://www.korespondent.net/main/71117>, 15.05.2003 and <http://www.korespondent.net/main/93883>, 04.05.2004.

⁶ Compare Euro bulletin, N. 5, May, 2005, p.6-7.



Picture 3: Ukrainian shop sign which offers »Euro-floors«. (private Photos)

of non-places. According to Marc Augé, Europe Squares within the EU can be allocated to the category non-places as they are like starting points, turntables of modern mobility.⁷ In contrast to Western Europe, the Europe Squares in the Ukraine can be described as having an anthropological character.

Further developing the ideas of Marc Augé, I would like to look at some more examples which show the difference of perception between the Ukraine and the European Union. For example, places such as supermarkets or shopping centres, have a very strong identity factor in the Ukraine and can act as anthropological places. Even though the construction of the first superstores took place as early as the mid nineties and mostly closely followed Western aesthetics, these places still have a significant function in Ukrainian cities.

Europe« were also celebrated in Ushgorod, Dnepropetrovsk and Rivno.⁶

As a part of official Europeanization in the Ukraine, squares whose names date from the Soviet era are being renamed. In contrast to Western Europe, where the »Europe Squares« are located near bus stations, railway stations and crossroads (for example, in Stuttgart, Vienna, Tuebingen), in the Ukraine, »Europe Squares« are situated in the middle of the cities. For example, in Kyjiv, Komsomol Square, once named after a Soviet Youth organization and the location of the Lenin Museum, has now been renamed Europe Square. To illustrate the importance of this, I would like to refer briefly to Marc Augé's concept

⁷ Compare Marc Augé: *Orte und Nicht-Orte. Vorüberlegungen zu einer Ethnologie der Einsamkeit*. Frankfurt am Main 1994, S. 93.

Most of the visitors move along the panopticum of Japanese televisions, Ukrainian vodka, German washing machines and French cheese as if they were in a gallery. These centres therefore represent an utopia of a standard of living which most of their visitors cannot afford.

However, it should also not be forgotten that a large section of the Ukrainian population has been in direct contact with ›European culture‹ over the last 15 years and has therefore modified its relationship to the Ukraine. »Europe« and the »European way of living« have become a role model for the lifestyle of many Ukrainians. According to official statistics there are 2 to 5 million people working abroad, about one fifth of the Ukrainian population.⁸

Most Ukrainians who have lived in the EU for a certain amount of time try to adopt European standards after their return. These attempts are transforming cultural traditions: A certain kind of »European experience« gained during their stay in an EU member country aids to widen the horizon and to broaden the mind of Ukrainian people towards new ways of living. These experiences of living abroad help change living customs and the common rhythm of life in the home country.

Everyday life in the Ukraine is full of second-hand Europe. For example, used cars from Western Europe have become a part of the landscape. Cars and lorries from the EU have found their way into the most remote corners



Picture 1: Sign announcing the sale of »Euro-coffins« on an Ukrainian cemetery. (private Photos)

⁸ Compare E.B. Kish: Pytanna bezpeky na novyh shidnyh kordonah evropejskogo sojuzu. In: »Strategichna Panorama« (»Strategic Panorama«) N. 1, 2004, http://www.niisp.gov.ua/vydanna/panorama/2004_1.php, 02.05.2004.

of the country. Not only the vehicles themselves, but the clear markings of regional origin have become an integral part of the Ukrainian scenery. In the middle of Ukrainian reality, signs appear advertising a bakery in Brussels, a plumber from Munich, a web design company from Florence, an undertaker from Graz and pest control from Berlin.

Europe has left a business card in the Ukraine in the naming of products and services. Europe-conscious consumers in the Ukraine can buy Euro-lamps, Euro-floors (Pic. 3) and Euro-condoms. They can also go to Euro-beauty parlours, get Euro-credit and, finally, get buried in a Euro-coffin, which costs ten times as much (Pic. 4).⁹ This use of ›Euro‹ as a description for products and services can also be found within the EU, but there it is generally used to describe cheaper services and products whereas the connotations of the term are still very positive in the Ukraine. For most Ukrainians, the term ›Euro‹ is like a seal which guarantees luxury and quality.

Summing up all that has been said: »Europeanization« is defined as an integral part of national and of individual identity politics. It is done both »top-down« – that is, by official structural measures – as well as »bottom-up« – that is, by private experiences inside and outside the Ukraine. According to the results of my preliminary research, Europeanization in the Ukraine is a complex process, which can be regarded as part of the nation's modernization alongside a qualitatively new level of Ukrainization. Both encourage liberation from pro-Soviet self-image, ideological stereotypes and national feelings of inferiority. These are all positive factors on the way to European integration and a new, supranational European identity for the Ukraine.

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