

## **Nationalism and National Identity of Western Ukraine in The Post - Soviet Era**

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## **Abstract**

The research is designed to examine the essence and roots of Ukrainian nationalism of Western Ukraine, categories of identity regarding Ukrainians, and to present how modern Ukrainian national identity is constructed. The aim of the study is to understand within the broad context of nationalism the complexity of Ukrainian nationalism that does not fit the commonly used definition of a nation; common language, common religion, and common historical memory.

The anthropological fieldwork is based on participant observation and in total 35 in-depth interviews which were conducted mainly in Lviv between 2014-2019. Moreover, in order to fully explore the notion of Ukrainian nationalism an analysis of national symbols, myths, traditions, and historical memory through its history is evaluated. Furthermore, the study analyzes the role of religion and OUN-UPA activities in shaping Ukrainian nationalism placing it also in the context of current political circumstances. The results of the research indicate that Ukrainian nationalism has its origins in Western Ukraine and then it spread from the West of Ukraine to the eastern parts of the country. As a consequence of the latest events; the Euromaidan Revolution, and the ongoing war with Russia, Ukrainian nationalism is being re-shaped and re-constructed. Those events caused also the resurrection of Stepan Bandera's myth which is associated with Western Ukraine.

**Keywords:** Anthropology; Bandera; nationalism; national identity; OUN-UPA; Ukrainian nationalism

## **INTRODUCTION**

Ukraine is the largest country in the Eastern Europe of significant geopolitical, geostrategic and geoeconomic importance for both Europe and Russia. The Ukrainian nation is a phenomenon that survived years of oppression and even though did not have a nation-state frame, managed to keep sentiment for Ukrainian national identity.

Being a part of the Soviet Union for more than 70 years has made a huge impact on Ukraine and has left Ukraine burdened with the Soviet legacy. Ukraine gained independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union and is still dealing with its complex history. The modern Ukrainian state struggles with many issues that are leftovers from the years of Soviet rule such as language, ethnic, political, and economic issues. Establishing an independent state in 1991 required a number of tools to construct or reconstruct national identity in new circumstances. The research is designed to examine the essence and roots of Ukrainian nationalism of Western Ukraine, categories of identity regarding Ukrainians and to present how modern Ukrainian national identity is constructed. The aim of the study is to understand within the broad context of nationalism the complexity of Ukrainian nationalism that does not fit the commonly used definition of a nation; common language, common religion and common historical memory. However, the Ukrainian state is a type of state that Murphy (2002, p.201) defines as nationalism that has historical connotations with a distinctive cultural group identified according to ethnolinguistic properties.

Moreover, due to various historical experiences, the country is marked with visible division; the Western part of Ukraine is pro-Western orientated, and the Eastern part of pro-Russian tendencies. This division is a reflection of Ukraine's complex history. In its quite short independence, Ukraine faced already two revolutions; the Orange Revolution (2004-2005) and the Revolution of Dignity (known also as the Euromaidan Revolution, 2014) which changed the direction of the country's domestic and foreign policies. Today, the country is facing the greatest challenge since its independence; Russia's military aggression against Ukraine. Once again Ukraine has to fight for its sovereignty, freedom, and independence.

## **RESULTS**

Modern Ukrainian nationalism has its roots in Western Ukraine which spread from that part of the country towards the east. What is more, in comparison with the other post-Soviet

republics is different because it did not develop simultaneously throughout the country and as one of the interlocutors emphasized “Ukraine, unlike Poland is not based on monoculture”<sup>1</sup>. Ukraine is not a homogenous country, it is multi-ethnic with a visible division in the country. The fact that Western Ukraine was under Austro-Hungarian rule, enabled Ukrainian nationalism to emerge there due to considerably mild and tolerant rule. Whereas the other part of Ukraine remained under the Russian Empire's rule where no appropriate conditions were found so that national consciousness could appear (Virág, 2012, p. 623). Therefore, Ukrainian nationalism which has its roots in Western Ukraine is historically associated with the West and hence, is closer to the European model based on democratic values in comparison with the eastern part of the country. This historical division has reflections in today's division of the country; linguistic, ethnic, economic, cultural, political, and social (Shulman, 2006, p. 250). It is there, in Western Ukraine that national awakening has begun and the first political movement took place. Moreover, the fact that not the whole country was under Russian rule affected how Ukrainian nationalism has shaped throughout the years and it enabled the Ukrainian nation to form its own identity not strictly based on Soviet propaganda. The historical division resulted also in cultural diversity that currently is going through reorganization and being based on homogenous Ukrainian culture throughout the country. Shulman (2006, p. 251) indicates two main camps perfectly reflecting this division between citizens of Ukraine; ethnic Ukrainians in Galicia and ethnic Russians in Donbas. The results of his survey reveals a great cultural diversity between those two regions. This is confirmed in the fieldwork conducted within the framework of this research since informants many times stressed the differences between Western Ukraine and Eastern Ukraine: “people in the East of Ukraine think we are all Banderites here in the west and we eat children”<sup>2</sup>. This presents different perceptions and how strong the division is set in the stereotypes between those two regions resulting from its historical experience. Such intolerance indeed finds its explanation in the past of the country but it must be noted that the Ukrainian authorities since gaining independence were unable to implement state policies that would reconcile the citizens of Ukraine

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<sup>1</sup> Data obtained during an interview in Lviv in 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Data obtained during the fieldwork in Lviv, 2018.

(Marples, 2007, p. 6). It is the latest events starting from the Orange Revolution until the outbreak of war that seems to bring resolution to this question.

My assumption is that if Ukraine would not remain under different rules, the whole Ukraine would be largely affected by the Soviet heritage and it would be more difficult to build a nation-state and distinctive Ukrainian identity. What is more, Ukrainian nationalism has entered a phase of re-shaping after the Orange Revolution and due to the current circumstances is going through re-invigoration that is primarily based on the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Ukrainian language, culture and tradition, creating Ukrainian identity and at the same time placing it as being different and separate from the Russian identity.

## **DISCUSSION**

In this study Ukrainian nationalism in the context of its emergence in Western Ukraine is academically studied, therefore in the first chapter, in order to comprehend the notion of Ukrainian nationalism, the concept of nationalism, ethnicity, identity and memory are examined within the framework of an anthropological theory.

Nationalism as a concept appeared after the French Revolution and now is the leading ideology continuously since the 20<sup>th</sup> century that produces political movement and on the other hand, may lead to conflicts. Nationalism, identity, and ethnicity share common features and are based on mutual relations between them, in certain circumstances they are more or less interrelated with each other, on the other hand, they may also exclude each other. In other words, the relationship between them depends on the cultural, social, or political context (Calhoun, 1993, pp. 212-213). In order to form nationalism of a certain nation, firstly national consciousness appears, based on awareness of the distinctiveness of a particular group that later on may form a nation.

Ukrainian national consciousness has its root in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Western Ukraine. Further, the notion of memory is discussed, as the other significant aspect in anthropological theory regarding the concept that reflects nationalism since collective memory is crucial in forming national identity (Gillis, 1994, p. 3). The notion of memory provides an analysis of how people remember, and forget, how they construct their memories and for what purposes in understanding Ukrainian nationalism in reference to OUN-UPA. Ukraine due to strong historical division, Soviet propaganda and lack of proper official policies after

1991 could not overcome the differences in the interpretation of common history, that resulted in emerging two conflicting national myths, both placed in the collective memory of residents of those two regions; Western Ukraine and Eastern Ukraine (Virág, 2012, p. 626).

It is the past and historical experience that shapes our identity, therefore following the Boasian approach historiography of Ukraine is discussed in order to show a full insight into the process of forming Ukrainian national consciousness and to have a close look at the complex issues that Ukraine faces today. Hence, in the second chapter, the history of Ukraine starting from the establishment of Kyivan Rus in the 9<sup>th</sup> century until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 is briefly presented in order to supplement the study with historical background. In Ukraine's case, it enables understanding not only the essentials of Ukrainian nationalism and its key symbols but also provides an explanation of the current events taking place in Ukraine. In this chapter, the establishment of Cossack Hetmanate, which is believed to be the foundation of the modern Ukrainian state, and the revival of Ukrainian nationalism in Galicia – considered as the cradle of Ukrainian nationalism is discussed (Nahaylo, 1999, p. 4; Katchanovski, et.al. 2013, pp. 1,2). Throughout its history, Ukraine for many years remained stateless, oppressed, or divided by its neighbors. Ukrainian nation many times had to fight for its freedom and independence. Despite being subordinated Ukrainian nationalism managed to survive and national consciousness revived.

Moreover, this chapter analyzes the construction of Ukrainian national symbols, the formation of national consciousness, and history writing after gaining independence which is crucial in order to understand the phenomenon of Ukrainian nationalism. Moreover, analysis of Ukrainian history gives an insight into the current events of the conflict in Ukraine.

The third chapter is an analysis of the influence of the religion in shaping national consciousness based on the example of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church in Galicia. Religion is a significant factor in shaping Ukrainian national consciousness. In the case of the Ukrainian national awakening, the clergy played an important role and were the largest group involved in the revival of Ukrainian nationalism (Himka, 1999, p.7). The Greek Catholic Church provided a significant contribution to the Ukrainian national movement

in Galicia. The role of the clergy was not limited to preaching: they were also politically engaged. They published newspapers and established reading clubs and other associations spreading national awakening

The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was abolished by the Soviet authorities, however, survived “underground” until it was officially restored in 1989 (Nahaylo, 1999, p. 15; Kuzio & Wilson, 1994, p. 59). The further part of this chapter mentions the involvement of the church during the Euromaidan Revolution and its support of Ukrainians participating in the protests. Further, the response of Patriarch Kirill concerning the outbreak of war in Ukraine and its influence on the division of the church is analyzed. For Patriarch Kirill, the invasion of Ukraine in fact is a war between two civilizations: the East with its traditional Christian values based on the concept of *Russkij Mir* (*rus. Русский мир*) and the morally corrupted West supporting “fascists” in Kyiv (Soroka, 2018, p. 90).

The fourth chapter discusses the OUN and UPA organizations, and the most controversial figure in Ukraine’s history Stepan Bandera. A figure that until these days both unites and divides the nation, since by some he is perceived as a traitor, who collaborated with the Nazis meanwhile for others a national hero, who fought for the freedom of Ukraine (Marples 2006, pp. 555-559). Therefore, it provides an analysis of the role of OUN-UPA in shaping Ukrainian identity in the West of Ukraine.

Moreover, it presents the contemporary perception of the notion of “Banderites” (*ukr. Бандерівці*) as followers of Stepan Bandera are often called. Ukrainian nationalists of the West of Ukraine were associated with “Banderites” and due to deeply rooted Soviet propaganda, carried and often still carry negative connotations (Halushko 2017, p. 75).

The OUN -UPA was active in the West of Ukraine, hence now in many Ukrainian Western cities monuments of Stepan Bandera may be found.

The attempts of the politicians to glorify Stepan Bandera and other OUN-UPA prominent members were causing antagonism in the country (Yurchuk, 2014, p.140). However, during the Euromaidan Revolution and the war in Donbas Ukrainians reached for figures of Ukrainian history who fought for the independence of Ukraine in the past. The revolution and conflict with Russia resulted in the revival of Bandera’s myth, a symbol of Ukrainian nationalism that is a symbol of resistance, unique to Ukraine and contrary to Russia. The most visible expression of this revival today is the commonly used slogan

“Glory to Ukraine! Glory to the heroes!” (*ukr. Слава Україні! Героям слава!*) primarily associated with the OUN-UPA organizations, now widely used by Ukrainians and an official salute of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Undoubtedly activities of OUN-UPA members created a hazy image of Ukrainian nationalism and added to the complex history of Ukraine's many catastrophic events which left the country with many unanswered questions and unresolved issues that reflect contemporary domestic and foreign policies.

The period of Ukraine's history after gaining independence in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union is covered in the fifth chapter. Challenging, due to being burdened with the Soviet legacy, the transition period is discussed. First parliamentary and presidential elections and the creation of new political elites are presented in this chapter. The Soviet past has left many internal issues that Ukraine did not manage to solve in the early years of independence. Therefore, the country is diversified in terms of historical experience, politically and ideologically (Malikowski, 2010, p. 66). This division impacts the political preferences, language and even attitude and behavior of Ukrainian citizens (Boyko, et. al. 2014, p. 294). Many of those unresolved problems that Ukraine was dealing with at that time led to the Orange Revolution.

Since gaining independence, Ukraine remained under the strong influence of Russia. Ukraine was interdependent on Russia economically and regarding the gas that Ukraine receives from Russia. What is more, gas from Russia to Europe is also transiting through the territory of Ukraine. Whenever Ukraine wanted to move towards the West, Russia strongly opposed and used gas as blackmail. Russia did not want to lose control over Ukraine but Ukraine wanted to become more independent and got closer ties with the West. Ukraine found itself stuck between the East and the West. Kuzio (2012, p. 396) indicates three phases in Ukraine's relations with the West (the USA, the EU, and NATO): disinterest, partnership, and disillusionment. However, from time to time Ukraine was leaving its pro-Western attitude in favor of Russia.

The country itself was divided, the East of Ukraine was western-oriented, whereas the East of Ukraine was pro-Russian. This division was also visible in Ukrainian politics – pro-Russian president Yanukovich versus pro-Western president Yushchenko. Yushchenko was supporting the idea of joining NATO and the EU, whereas Yanukovich wanted closer ties with Russia (Harasymiw, 2005, pp. 207-208). The suspended signing of the



Association Agreement with the European Union by president Yanukovich caused massive brutally confronted by police protests that quickly turned into the revolution so-called Euromaidan Revolution. The revolution resulted in more than 100 people being killed and president Yanukovich being ousted. The events that took place aftermath of the revolution continue until today. President Putin saw the opportunity in the chaotic destabilized situation in Ukraine and decided to reach for territory Russia had claims to after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Donbas region. In the following steps, Russia illegally annexed Crimea (Boyko, Herron & Sverdun, 2014, p. 286).

This chapter provides an analysis of what caused the Euromaidan Revolution, what changed afterward the revolution, and what led to the conflict with Russia and the declaration of war. The further part focuses on the war that Putin declared on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 against Ukraine. The war was not provoked and is unjustified. Putin stated that the war is aimed at the “demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine” and accused Ukraine of carrying out genocide on Russian-speaking inhabitants of the Donbas region. In fact, he realized that he is losing influence on and inside of Ukraine which got closer ties with the West, and after the Euromaidan Revolution he could not set up a pro-Russian government in Ukraine. Putin is referring to the Ukrainian government as the neo-Nazis. What neo-Nazis is Putin looking for in Ukraine? Ukrainian government certainly is not Nazi, however, there are accusations that Ukraine is referring to fascist symbols. Undoubtedly Putin is referring to the Soviet rhetoric regarding Ukrainian nationalists. Stepan Bandera and OUN-UPA members, Ukrainian nationalists fighting for the Ukrainian national cause and freedom were presented by Soviet propaganda as fascists and traitors who collaborated with Nazis. The Soviet authorities were aware of the importance that Bandera and OUN-UPA members played in shaping national feelings in Western Ukraine and had to quickly counteract in order to stop the spread of nationalistic feelings, thus the Soviets in their propaganda put emphasis on the affiliation with the enemy, the Nazis. The figure of Stepan Bandera is very controversial.

In Poland, Bandera is perceived as a bandit, responsible for murdering innocent Poles in Volhynia in Russia as a fascist, hence any manifestation and glorification of Bandera or other OUN-UPA members causes protests and tensions with Poland, Russia and Israel<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Due to allegation of OUN-UPA’s collaboration with Nazis in pogrom of Jews in Lviv.

Meanwhile in Ukraine as a result of Soviet propaganda, his representation also differs, in the East of Ukraine the Soviet rhetoric is being repeated, whereas in the West of Ukraine he is regarded as the national hero who fought for independent Ukraine (Marples, 2006, pp. 555-559). In the case of Ukraine, the same historical events that are not fitting in the officially accepted norms of political correctness within the borders of one state are perceived differently. Therefore, the nation was divided in terms of the perception of Bandera and OUN-UPA members. However, during the Euromaidan Revolution a very slow process of accepting OUN-UPA as part of Ukrainian history, causing re-shaping and re-forming Ukrainian nationalism, began. The memory of OUN-UPA's struggle for independence although dividing the nation has more and more features proving that in the given context and circumstances, it bounds the nation. Attempts to rehabilitate the dark past of OUN-UPA may be a form of reaffirming Ukrainian identity.

Ukraine is situated between the East and the West and forms a so-called buffer zone, that blocks Russia from the West (Clem, 2014, p. 219). Historically placed under Polish and Russian influence, therefore, the next chapter discusses Ukrainian international relations, limited to its relations with two neighboring countries; Poland and Russia and the European Union.

Analysis of Ukraine's relations with the two most important neighbors that represent two contrary civilizations enables an understanding of its geopolitical, geostrategic, and geoeconomic importance. Ukraine historically has strong ties with both Poland and Russia, West of Ukraine is strongly influenced by Poland whereas the central and eastern part of Ukraine is by Russia since firstly it remained under the control of the Russian Empire then the Bolsheviks, and finally after the WWII whole modern Ukraine became part of the Soviet Union. Therefore, this study analyzes the relations of Ukraine with only those two countries. The European Union is also significant in terms of the geostrategic and geopolitical importance of Ukraine placing it in the context of the current conflict in Ukraine and adding an important feature to Ukrainian nationalism, which is based on being also a European.

Ukraine's relations with Poland have long-lasting history, although interspersed with turbulent events; such as massacres of Poles in Volhynia and Eastern Galicia conducted by UPA and OUN and Operation Vistula carried out by the Polish authorities that forced many

Ukrainians to resettle in the west of Poland (Gibas-Krzak, p.7). Those events shadowed the relations of those two countries and from time to time are being dragged up, for instance, the quite recent case of proposed by the Polish authorities an amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance containing the phrase "crimes of Ukrainian nationalists" (Polish Institute of National Remembrance, 2018). Despite the difficult events in the past Poland and Ukraine tried to maintain good relations and in 1992 the Polish – Ukrainian Friendship Treaty was signed by both governments. In the following years, Ukraine and Poland established cooperation on many different aspects: political, economic, military, and interregional cooperation. During that time Ukraine was still under strong Russian influence and had closer ties with Russia than with the West, whereas Poland was leaning towards acceptance in the EU and NATO. A few years earlier Poland has undergone transformation too, thus offered its assistance to Ukraine in the transformation and support in the representation of Ukraine in the international arena. Poland was also engaged in the support of the Orange Revolution. During that period Poland once again took the role of Ukrainian representative in the international arena and was a mediator with the EU regarding the 2004 presidential elections.

Again, during the Euromaidan Revolution, Ukraine could count on Polish support and the stand of the Polish government towards the annexation of Crimea by Russia was firm and consequently condemned. However, in 2019 the Polish - Ukrainian relations began to worsen due to the amendment to the Act. It caused turmoil in the relations between those two countries which resulted in the anti-Polish demonstration (Kononczuk, 2018). Despite differences in regarding history and tensions that occur from time to time, Poland and Ukraine are good partners who are supporting each other when it is necessary.

After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, Poland immediately condemned the Russian invasion. Moreover, the Polish delegation consisting of the prime minister and deputy minister together with the Slovenian prime minister and the Czech prime minister were the very first foreign high-level delegation that visited Kyiv capital city since the outbreak of the war in order to show support and solidarity. Since the beginning of the war, Poland became a shelter for over 2 million Ukrainian refugees. The Polish government took a number of initiatives to provide aid to Ukrainian refugees in Poland, moreover

supports Ukraine militarily and provides humanitarian aid to Ukraine. The Polish government took also a firm stand against the Russian Federation which caused deterioration of the Polish-Russian relations. The Russian aggression on Ukraine and Russia's neo-imperialist and expansionist policy resulted in strengthening relations between Poland and Ukraine and facing the Russian threat all unsolved disputes are put aside, perhaps the war will also bring positive development of it.

Relations between Ukraine and Russia are as long and complex as the relations of Ukraine with Poland. According to the Russian approach Ukraine and Russia form one nation that has its origins in the Kyivan Rus, based on the presumption that Ukrainians in fact are Russians, there was no distinction between Ukrainians and Russians (Diec, 2015, p. 114). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Ukraine was under the rule of the Russian Empire and went through intensive Russification. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Ukrainians' attempts to establish an independent state failed and Ukraine became part of the USSR in 1921. Ukraine remained part of the Soviet Union for 72 years until it gained independence in 1991 and afterward was still economically dependent on Russia, and the latter did not want to lose control over Ukraine, thus by means of propaganda and gas as a tool enabling interference in Ukraine's both internal and foreign affairs in order to achieve its own goals (Günay, 2015, p. 99). It must be noted that Ukraine is largely dependent on gas from Russia, moreover, through Ukraine's territory Russia exports gas to Europe. Ukraine's close ties with Russia resulted in weak and distanced relations with Europe. However, Ukraine tried to get closer with Europe but each such attempt was immediately opposed by Russia. Russia regarded Ukraine's integration with the West as a threat, especially NATO.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union Ukraine remained burdened with many unsolved issues that resulted in conflict with Russia; among others the dispute over Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet causing destabilization and separatist moods already back in 1992, customs and currency conflict and conflict in Transnistria. The Ukrainian - Russian Friendship Treaty was signed quite late in comparison with Poland because it was signed in 1997. One of the main postulates were strategic friendship and recognition of existing borders and their inviolability. The treaty solved territorial claims issues (Gibas-Krzak, 2003, pp. 77-80). The Russian policy towards Ukraine was such influential that the Ukraine government

agreed to lease <sup>a</sup> military harbor in Sevastopol for Russian Black Fleet for twenty years and then president Yanukovich prolonged it for another thirty years. The other issue arising after the collapse of the USSR was its large arsenal of nuclear weapon that remained on the territory of Ukraine (Nahaylo, 1999, p. 429). The whole arsenal was transferred to Russia, and in return, Ukraine received financial aid from the USA and security guarantees from both Russia and the West.

Russia's privileged position in terms of Ukraine's economic dependency, internal problems of Ukraine, the strong position of oligarchs in Ukraine and their connections with politics, weak European policy towards Ukraine, and on the other hand strong, cooperative policy with Russia strengthened the position of the latter in both Ukraine and on the international arena. Russia managed to set up a pro-Russian government, thus Ukraine became politically and economically dependent on Russia. However, not whole of Ukraine was supporting the pro-Russian orientation, after president Yanukovich rejected the assimilation process with the European Union in a favour of closer relations with Russia, the Ukrainian nation began its protest that quickly turned into a revolution that led to the overthrow of the Ukrainian government.

Russia used a chaotic situation in the country and reached for territories that were subject of a dispute after the collapse of the USSR; the Donbas region and Crimea. The annexation of Crimea was condemned by the Western world, and a number of sanctions were imposed on Russia afterward but in fact, nothing changed, the West was continuing its close relations with Russia, meanwhile, Ukraine for 8 years remained in a state of war with Russia in the Donbas region. Nevertheless, contrary to Russia's preliminary expectations, the majority of ethnic Russians of Donbas did not mobilize against Ukraine which proved that the ethnic Russians in Ukraine have chosen to be associated with Ukraine and that ethnonationalism in Ukraine does not jeopardize Ukrainian nationalism. In fact, those unsolved conflicts, internal issues of Ukraine, the inaction of the West, and its weak and permissive policy towards Russia allowed Putin to declare war against Ukraine on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, 2022.

Ukraine became a victim of Russian neo-imperial and expansion policy, which expresses nostalgia towards Russia's once greatness. Russia by all means is trying to impose its

hegemony on Ukraine. On that day the whole world's attention focused on an unprovoked and unjustified military attack on a country that was not a threat. Russia once again broke the international and attacked the territorial integrity and the Ukrainian nation-state. Once more Ukraine has to fight for its sovereignty, independence and freedom.

The West knowing the geostrategic, geopolitical and geoeconomic importance of both Europe's security and food supply could have and could have done more in terms of stopping Russia's expansion. The warning that Russian president Vladimir Putin is unpredictable and is a threat not only to the national security of Ukraine but to the whole of Europe came already back in 2008 when Russia invaded Georgia and then in 2014 when Russia began the occupation of the Donbas and annexed Crimea. Europe did not give enough importance to Ukraine's case, and Ukraine was not regarded as an important partner for the West. Ukraine's relations with the European Union reach back to the 1994 when Partnership and Cooperation Agreement was signed. However, the European Union was reluctant towards Ukraine's membership. None of the Ukrainian presidents obtained assurances of future membership.

As a result, Ukraine got closer to Russia and became interdependent on the latter. The rest of the Ukrainian nation did not want to agree to such a state, therefore protested against Russia and in favor of being a part of Europe. At that time the West should have paid more attention to Ukraine, the situation slightly changed due to the Russian aggression on the Donbas region and annexation of Crimea. However, Europe continued its indulgent policy with Russia. Moreover, Europe is depending on gas from Russia, which Russia is often using in negotiations. By buying Russian gas Europe is also financing Putin's regime. The European Union has shown unity in the face of the war, however, the member states could not come to a consensus regarding gas from Russia. Europe realized the strategic importance of Ukraine and also how much Europe is depending on Russia (mostly in terms of gas and oil supply), after the latter declared war against Ukraine and now the West found itself in a difficult position and under direct and real threat of a war with Russia.

Ukraine now became a zone that stops Russia from the rest of Europe and its struggle for its own national security is also a fight for European security. The outbreak of the war made also the West understand it needs to act and act quickly in order not to lose Ukraine over Russia since Ukraine's defeat would mean that the West would be directly

neighboring Russia and also it would be a threat of a further Russian expansion. Therefore, at the beginning of April 2022, the European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen during her official visit to Kyiv handed over a questionnaire for European Union membership to president Zelensky (European Commission, 2022). Certainly, it is a huge step in EU-Ukrainian relations, a historical moment for the Ukrainian nation, and a great achievement of president Zelensky, on the other hand, it is a poke directed at Russia. Putin tried to implement his plan regarding Ukraine to keep it in its own geopolitical zone, as a result in 2008 NATO denied Ukraine access to membership plans (Caşın, 2015, p. 79). However, the Euromaidan Revolution and pro-European moods in the country, then the conflict in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea successfully pulled Ukraine out of Russia's influence.

The current president of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky also proved to be a great leader who perfectly leads and supports the Ukrainian nation during these difficult conditions. Under his leadership, the government maintains functioning despite extraordinary circumstances. The Ukrainian desire to join NATO has always been the greatest fear of Russia, expressed already back in 2008 during the NATO Bucharest Summit when the president Putin strongly opposed the potential NATO enlargement, at the same time NATO now fears that any further step could provoke Russia and the conflict would escalate (Clinton, 2014, pp. 228-230). Therefore, Ukraine received a response that will not become a NATO member anytime soon. Russia threatens the West that any kind of involvement of NATO will be taken seriously and Russia will be ready to respond to it. Thus, out of fear of escalation of the conflict and possible outbreak of a third world war, the West's actions are limited to multiple sanctions imposed on Russia as well as supporting Ukraine with all kinds of help, including providing military equipment. The Russian aggression on Ukraine has jeopardized European security and right now the further development of the war depends on Ukrainian defense militarily supported by the West. However, Putin has already proved to be unpredictable, and actually, any move of NATO could provoke him.

There are a few scenarios on how the war can develop. One of them is NATO's involvement in the conflict and defeat of Russia or escalation that could turn into a third world war, the second is Russia taking just the east of Ukraine and setting up a pro-Russian government in Kyiv, whereas the other one is the defeat of Ukraine and incorporating

whole Ukraine into the Russian Federation, the other scenario assumes Russia would take over eastern parts of Ukraine in case of lack of military success this could also be satisfying for Putin. One of the worst scenarios is Russia reaching for nuclear weapons, which already been mentioned by the Kremlin. The whole world's attention is turned to the development of this conflict, considering reports from the front Putin will not stop until he gets what he wants, the question is what exactly he wants to achieve. Nonetheless, no matter how the conflict will develop the Ukrainian nation will survive.

Ukraine as a descendant of Kyivan Rus is a country with a long-lasting tradition that managed to survive and keep the national spirit despite its difficult history when had no state and was constantly forced to fight for its freedom and independence. Ukraine spent most of its long history divided between neighboring countries; Poland and Russia. Today's division of the country and strong Polish and Russian influence (among other ethnic issues, language issues, minority issues, and religion) is a reflection of its complex history.

Gaining independence in 1991 was long awaited historical moment in the history of Ukraine. The modern state of Ukraine faced the challenge of how to (re)build a nation. The Soviet legacy left Ukraine with many difficult issues which despite 31 years of independence many remained unsolved and in fact lead to the current military conflict.

## **CONCLUSION**

As it is history and experience that shape us and our identity and create who we are today, then certainly the latest event re-shape the identity of the Ukrainian nation. Ukraine that we see now is a reflection of its past, however, the number of events that began in 2004 during the Orange Revolution, the events of 2014; the Euromaidan Revolution, the war with Russia in Donbas, the annexation of Crimea, and finally the Russian war against Ukraine have re-shaped Ukrainian nationalism and re-shaped Ukrainian national consciousness. The modern Ukrainian nationalism has its roots in Western Ukraine and has a direct impact on nationalism in the other parts of Ukraine that is going through a phase of re-construction.

As a result of the conflict with Russia, the national consciousness and Ukrainian nationalism went through a revival and reconstruction based on being differentiated from Russia, putting emphasis on the uniqueness of the Ukrainian national symbols that



represents resistance and a fight for national freedom. Therefore, in this circumstance also the revival of Bandera's myth was possible, that perhaps would not take place otherwise or not on such a scale. After gaining independence, a strongly divided nation in 1991 seems to be finally united today.

Ukrainians now are united more than ever and are determined to fight for their freedom and independence of Ukraine. The revival and spread of national consciousness were increasing slowly after the Euromaidan, then it spread towards the Eastern parts of Ukraine where Ukrainian nationalistic feelings were not deeply rooted and as strong as in Western Ukraine after the Russian war in Donbas and the annexation of Crimea. However, after Russia declared war against Ukraine, Ukrainian nationalistic feelings boosted and national consciousness peaked.

Ukrainian nationalism is not a threat to the stability and security of Europe, it is the Russian neo-imperial and expansion policy that is the greatest threat to Ukraine and to the whole world. Just before declaring war against Ukraine, Russian president Vladimir Putin stated that there is no nation as the Ukrainian one, however, this study proves otherwise; Ukraine is a country with its own unique and distinctive culture, language, tradition, and history.

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