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## **Identity and Nation-Building in Ukraine: Reconciliation of Identities from a Conflict Prevention Perspective**

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ECMI RESEARCH PAPER #125

December 2020



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**ECMI Research Paper #125**  
**European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)**  
**Research Paper Series Editors:**  
**Dr. Sergiusz Bober and Dr. Andreea Cârstocea.**  
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ISSN 1435-9812; ISSN-Internet 2196-4890



# Identity and Nation-Building in Ukraine: Reconciliation of Identities from a Conflict Prevention Perspective

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*In less than 20 years after gaining its independence from the Soviet Union, Ukraine has faced several events, which have shaped the process of nation-building. The Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea and the armed conflict with Russia have intensified the ‘us–them’ line of self-identification of the “Ukrainians” versus the “Others”. Ongoing “Ukrainisation” is spreading insecurity among minority groups and endangers possibilities to establish a cohesive Ukrainian society with a shared sense of belonging. In the context of a multicultural Ukrainian space and the international commitments of the State to protect and promote rights of its national, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, adopting an ethnocentric approach to the nation-building of the country is a conflict-prone factor. By examining and discussing identities in the perspective of the ongoing nation-building process in Ukraine, this research paper aims to identify the potential of the State and individuals to find mechanisms and grounds for reconciliation and integration. This is approached through a series of in-depth interviews and a complex analysis of current political guidelines on education, language and decommunisation.*

**Keywords:** *Ukraine; identity; nation-building; reconciliation; post-conflict; conflict prevention; minorities; Eastern Europe.*

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## **1. Introduction**

External forces and events are able to create profound change and can become powerful factors for shaping identities (Özkirimli, 2010). In the case of Ukraine, major events, such as the Euromaidan, the annexation of Crimea and the armed conflict with Russia, have intensified the “us–them” line of self-identification of the “Ukrainians” versus the “Others”. Meanwhile, the country’s nation-building process has become a political project of the State and is seen as a necessity to Ukraine’s future integration into the European space (Kosmachev, 2015). However, whenever differences become political, division becomes an obstacle (Kosmachev, 2015). As an ethno-centric approach to nation-



building holds the potential for conflicts with national and ethnic minorities (Kuczynska-Zonik and Kowalczyk, 2016), the reconciliation of identities and their cohesion as a part of the Ukrainian nation is essential for the country's stability. In order to form an inclusive national identity and prevent another potential conflict, ethnic and civic identities need to be promoted equally.

This research paper, based on a Masters thesis resulting from the cooperation between the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (IFSH) at the University of Hamburg and the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) (Henke, 2019), is guided by two research questions: “What are the mechanisms for reconciling identities adopted by individuals?”; and “By which means do current nation-building strategies support or hinder mechanisms for reconciliation?” Overall, it aims at contributing to a better understanding of recent developments in Ukraine and puts an emphasis on the necessity to include and reconcile different identities within the country as a conflict prevention mechanism. By focusing on empirical identity research (part I) and an analytical review of policies concerning identities (part II), the post-2014 situation in Ukraine is elaborated upon, with conclusions and recommendations offered in the final section.

## **2. Identity and conflict prevention in nation-building**

Identity is not a given, but an elementary and defining cultural and biological construction, developing throughout our life (Kemp, 2001; Assmann, 2012). The topic is rather complex and has been studied in various fields, thus inheriting manifold definitions and approaches. Not only do descriptive mechanisms produce identity, but it is mainly the product of a mutual process between social and external factors influencing the individual (Assmann, 2012). In the context of this paper, identity is understood through two mechanisms: the civic and ethnic identity, each with cultural and/or national components. Ethnic identity refers to ancestral heritage and is a birth-ascribed status “based on physical and cultural characteristics defined by outside groups” (Baumann, 2004). This includes not only ‘race’, but also a common proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, elements of a common culture, a link with a homeland and a sense of solidarity (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996). By contrast, civic identity is a set of “beliefs and emotions about oneself as a participant in civic life” (Hart *et al.*, 2011). Linked to particular social groups located in specific geographical areas (not necessarily states or nations), this concept contains elements of membership, participation, and a concern for rights (Hart *et al.*, 2011).

Similar to identity, nation-building builds on civic and ethnic components. As a process in which political actors aim to convince people within the same administrative territory to be part of the same community (Polese, 2011), it involves two key factors: objective (e.g. territory) versus subjective (e.g. shared political ideas) (Kuczynska-Zonik and Kowalczyk, 2016; Maksimovtsova, 2017). Civic nation-building includes equal treatment (Shulman, 2005) and guaranteed participation (Kuczynska-Zonik and



Kowalczyk, 2016) of all ethnic groups.

In the context of conflict prevention, exclusive and inclusive identity are of particular importance. While inclusive identity relies on the identification of oneself with a social group (opting-in), exclusive identity emphasizes role differences and the degree of dissimilarity between individuals (opting-out) (Assmann, 2012). This is especially important for the development of identity, as it mostly develops when dealing with “the Other” (Ertelt-Vieth, 2005): groups define themselves by comparison to “strangers” and not by reference to their own characteristics (Armstrong, 1997). Based on this assumption, Social Identity Theory (SIT) is able to explain a number of overlapping issues concerning identity and conflict. The theory analyses the role of self-conception in group membership, group processes, and intergroup relations, as a non-reductionist, interactionist theory (Hogg, 2006). Through the hypothesis of positive self-esteem, social identification and social comparison, the theory follows the premise that conflicts are particularly prone to escalate when identities are threatened (Zick, 2003; Tajfel and Turner 1979; Tajfel *et al.*, 1971). In other words, identity becomes one of the key factors in ethnic conflicts (Baldwin *et al.*, 2007). Contributing mechanisms include the generation of a collective behaviour, social categorisation (Zick, 2003), and ethnocentrism (Hogg, 2006).

In- and out-group distinction influence conflict readiness as a process of stereotyping and depersonalization of groups and generate collective behaviour that may justify deprivation, discrimination and devaluation through social differences (Zick, 2003). Inter-group conflicts and the negotiation of social identities can arise for example due to the “unsatisfactory” status of one group in a social system, resulting in the politicization of dissatisfaction, revolutions or passive resistance (*Ibid.*, 2003). Likewise, feelings of alienation, discrimination, exclusion, suppression (Van der Stoel, 1999) and the failure to integrate diverse groups might lead minorities to seek support from their kin-state or separate themselves from the state they live in (Kemp, 2001). Therefore, integrating diversity and multiple identities during the nation-building process becomes a fundamental aspect of conflict prevention (*Ibid.*, 2001).

### **3. Nation-building and identity in Ukraine**

In its past, *Okraina* (borderland) (Motyl and Krawchenko, 1997) has been a territory of recurring cultural and geopolitical confrontation between nomadic and agrarian societies, caught in-between Europe and Asia, Communism and Nationalism (Subtelny, 1999), facing the Catholic West on the one side and the Orthodox East on the other (Motyl and Krawchenko, 1997). Not only the well-known east–west division (Stehphanenko 2003) between the western part (once part of Poland, Czechoslovakia and Romania) and the Tsarist/Soviet-dominated east (Subtelny, 1999), but also constantly shifting territorial borders (Grand Duchy of Lithuania, Ottoman Empire, Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth, Crimean



Tatar Khanate and Muscovy) contributed to the country's position as a political borderland (Motyl and Krawchenko, 1997). Therefore, Ukrainian identity involves different religious, regional and linguistic dimensions. In addition, the present territory of Ukraine has been ruled most of history by others, having little opportunity to develop a sense of a commonly shared national identity (Stehphanenko, 2003). Consequently, a coherent national identity and a well-formulated national agenda are difficult to achieve (Prizel, 1994). The internal differences in Ukraine originate deep within its historical experience and an absence of collective memory (Prizel, 1998). Looking for example at the ethnic components, these may rely either on an ethnic Ukrainian national identity (European culture<sup>1</sup>, Russian and Ukrainian ethnic and nation-state as competing against one another) or on an Eastern Slavic national identity (promoting Eastern Slavic Identity<sup>2</sup>, stressing ties with Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States) (Shulman, 2005).

After proclaiming independence in August and the referendum in December 1991, where Ukraine's independence was supported by an overwhelming 90%, President Leonid Kravchuk chose a pro-Western orientation and anti-Russian rhetoric (*Ibid.*, 2005). During the process of nation and state building, one challenging component as an important attribute of ethnic identity (Kuzio, 1998) remained problematic from the beginning of the Post-Soviet transformation: the language factor (Stehphanenko, 2003). The adoption of the Ukrainisation program pushed for the usage of the Ukrainian language in education, politics, economy (Motyl and Krawchenko, 1997) and media, but met with resistance in the South and East of the country (Basiuk, 1999). Ineffective language policies in education and mass media did not change the supremacy of Russian language in public and private life (Shulman, 2005; Subtelny, 1999). Similar to language, symbols of statehood, common myths and history were a crucial factor in shaping the national ethos (Basiuk, 1999). Under Kravchuk, the Hrushevsky schema was introduced to maximize distinctiveness between Russia and Ukraine (Janmaat, 2000) and legitimized a separate Ukrainian identity (Kuzio, 1998). The schema, named after the Ukrainian historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky (1866-1934), established new myths, such as Kyïvan Rus'<sup>3</sup> and the Hetman state<sup>4</sup> as early forms of Ukrainian statehood (Janmaat, 2000). Overall, this perspective offered the viewpoint that Ukrainians were not "younger brothers" within Russian historical mythology, but separate Slavic people belonging to the European civilization. Moreover, it enabled Ukrainians to be proud of their historical achievements (Kuzio, 1998). In the end, the national anthem, currency, hymns and flags were based on Hrushevsky (*Ibid.*; Motyl and Krawchenko, 1997), also including the process of decommunisation (Kuzio, 1998).

In contrast, the rhetoric changed in 1994 with the presidency of Leonid Kuchma (Motyl and Krawchenko, 1997). Although reorienting foreign policy eastward and strengthening economic ties with Russia failed to contribute to a clear national identity (Shulman, 2005), the new constitution in 1996 established civic and ethnic elements similarly (Basiuk, 1999). Granting privileges for ethnic



Ukrainian identity (e.g. emphasis on the development of a Ukrainian nation in historical self-consciousness, tradition and culture), civic elements, such as the right to citizenship by birth or guaranteed freedom to use minority languages, were also included (Shulman, 2005; Basiuk, 1999; Polese, 2011). In the same year, president Kuchma proclaimed that state building was completed. Yet, an ideological guidance of the governmental elite was missing, which led to a long and complex process of transformation from a Soviet to an independent civic Ukrainian society (Subtelny, 1999; Kuzio, 1998).

The Revolution of Dignity (*Революція гідності*) in 2014 intensified the process of nation-building and raised the question of Ukrainian identity once again (Kuczynska-Zonik and Kowalczyk, 2016). Sparked by President Viktor Yanukovich's refusal to sign the Association Agreement with the European Union (Haran and Zolkina, 2017), the revolution was the result of growing political consciousness and national identity (Kuczynska-Zonik and Kowalczyk, 2016). Overall, society opposed the authoritarian regime of president Yanukovich through a civic protest (Kulyk, 2014), and came together to develop a new State based on European values (Kuczynska-Zonik and Kowalczyk, 2016). The events brought a change to ethnonational identities, as people who had felt ambivalent about their national belonging before not only came to feel much more strongly Ukrainian, but also became more active in civil society (Kulyk, 2014). The subsequent goal of the new government was to develop an effective civil state and work towards European integration, which was only intensified by the annexation of Crimea and the crisis in Donbass (Kuczynska-Zonik and Kowalczyk, 2016; Haran and Zolkina, 2017). Next to foreign and domestic policies governing Ukrainian security, economy, language, education, symbols and history, decentralization (Chabanna and Sydoruk, 2017) as well as the dispute over the Catholic Orthodox Church (Vasiutynskyi, 2018) became additional elements of nation building.

#### **4. Nation-building and the reconciliation of identities in Ukraine**

By defining differences from external political communities (exclusion of “Others” and inclusion of “Us” as citizens), an understanding of “what it is” and “what is not” constructs the identity of a nation (Kuzio, 2001). As stressed in the previous section, majority–minority relations can escalate whenever the “significant other” denies the authenticity of the in-group and threatens the other identity (*Ibid.*, 2001). In the case of Ukraine, a crucial point relating to this assumption is the legitimate recognition of different identities separating Russians and Ukrainians (*Ibid.*, 2001). Once independent in 1991, after Russification and de-ethnification under the Soviet Union, Ukrainians found themselves in the majority and had to redefine their previous minority status (Bugajski, 1991). Moreover, the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union took away a vital point of nation-building: Ukraine lacked a unifying narrative and figures given an uneventful transformation (Prizel, 1998). Especially because of the historical, religious, and linguistic closeness between both countries, embedded in complex historical, political and economic



factors, this relationship turned out to be the most sensitive issue for policies (Stephanenko, 2003). On the one hand, the lack of clear-cut lines dividing Ukrainians and Russians enabled individuals to commute between identities (Kuzio, 1998). However, this made it difficult to construct a civil society, leading to a lack of political community (*Ibid.*, 1998). Although defining Russia as “the Other” provided an ideal opportunity for nation-building under Kravchuck, elites had to remain careful when differentiating between “our Russians” (in Ukraine) and “those Russians” (in Russia) (Kuzio, 2001).

The crisis in 2014 was a turning point. Military intervention, unstable situation on the country’s borders, and the media confrontation with Russia, were and still are serious challenges to Ukraine's national identity (Maksimovtsova, 2017). However, these events contributed to the in-group’s uniqueness, shaping identity and creating boundaries towards the Russian State (Kuzio, 2001). Lacking clear boundaries, politics were forced to rely on assertive policies to establish Ukraine in the international system and to attain national cohesiveness within (Pizel, 1998). Therefore, Ukrainisation continued to rely strongly on ethnic identity formation, making Ukraine “more Ukrainian” and more ethnically exclusive (Arel, 2018). As identity borders hardened, the process of nation-building turned towards an anti-Russian rhetoric, affecting not only foreign policy, but also the internal political landscape (Kulyk, 2014) for other minority groups.

When a country’s sovereignty and integrity are in danger, civil freedom and cultural diversity become more problematic (Kuczynska-Zonik and Kowalczyk, 2016). Likewise, periods of transition and insecurity are particularly generative of excessive nationalism in either post-conflict or pre-conflict situations. Often this is at the expense of minorities, because they are perceived as an historical enemy, a threat or a soft target (Kemp, 2001). Consequently, not only ethnic, but also civic components are important elements to nation-building, such as civic consciousness of national territory, or readiness to defend the state (*Ibid.*, 2001). Policies have to remain inclusive, on the one hand of Ukrainian demands to be recognized as the “core”, and on the other hand, to non-Ukrainians as co-partners within the emerging civic society (Kuzio, 1998). Different identities (individually or among groups) underlie the necessity to reconcile within one state in order to build a conscious national identity.

## **5. Data set I: the (im)possibility of reconciling identities?**

In today’s globalized society, individual identities are increasingly multiple and multi-layered. This includes a sense of having several horizontal identities – for instance, belonging to more than one ethnicity or overlapping various identities based on factors such as linguistics, religion or gender (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2012).

### **5.1 Set-up and methodology**

The qualitative analysis of how identities in Ukraine are reconciled was based on a semi-structured





survey interview with 14 representative participants from different minority communities. The questionnaire contained six open questions<sup>5</sup> and a demographic data section<sup>6</sup>. The first part of the survey (questions one to three) aims to identify mechanisms and elements related to the individual reconciliation of identities. The second part (questions four to six) observes perceived threats towards the chosen identity. All interviews were conducted within a range of two months (March to May 2019) with officials from the (local) Ukrainian government, members of non-governmental institutions, or academic staff. With an equal gender distribution and covering an age group from 21 to 61, the participants were residents of five different regions in Ukraine: Kyiv, Odesa, Zakarpattia, Chernivtsi and Lviv. Individual interviews lasted between five to forty minutes, resulting in a collected data material of 220 minutes. Each conversation was transcribed in Russian/Ukrainian and subsequently translated from Ukrainian and Russian into English<sup>7</sup>.

Qualitative content analysis (QCA), following Mayring (2015), proved to be an efficient analytical tool for the collected data set. Through inductive category definition, within a reductive and repetitive text analysis process, generalization and a comprehensive overview were achieved (ibid.). The goal of the categorization system was to create a narrow and descriptive form of the content in relation to the research question, while taking into account relevant quality criteria (objectivity, reliability and validity) (ibid.). After significant statements from the text were identified, the content was first paraphrased, then generalized and later assigned to a maximum of two categories.

## 5.2 Comprehensive category results

The macro analysis of the interviews revealed 112 relevant text segments connected to identity, which allowed a categorization of 133 statements (21 with two categories). Overall, 10 relevant categories regarding identities were identified. Civic, ethnic and reconciled identities mark the three biggest categories with 23 to 24 statements each. The subsequent subcategories, language, territory, traditions and symbols follow with 11 to 22 statements individually. The three smallest categories, with less than ten statements each, are education, history and religion in relation to identity. An in-depth analysis of the individual categories was carried out to observe perceptions in detail and identify mechanisms for the reconciliation of identities. For each finding, citations from the interviews follow in the footnotes below.

### *Reconciled identity*

A reconciled identity – or the overall identity of an individual – is united by an ethnic and a civic component. Although the terms “ethnic” and “civic” are not mentioned specifically, this mechanism is described in various ways and amounts to the same process: “blood”, “culture”, “roots” or “ethnic” (ethnic identity – minority identity) is combined with expressions such as “heart”, “political”, “resident”, “citizen” or “patriot” (civic identity – Ukrainian identity).<sup>8</sup> The analysis reveals that various ethnic identities can be reconciled with a civic identity. In general, minorities are aware of their common



belonging to the Ukrainian state and therefore adopt a civic Ukrainian identity, while keeping an ethnic minority identity as part of their overall identification<sup>9</sup>. Mixing and appreciating different traditions, sharing cultural events<sup>10</sup> and the knowledge of multiple languages<sup>11</sup>, are factors contributing to a successful reconciliation of both. Altogether, having more than one identity is perceived an asset and can build bridges across divides<sup>12</sup>. Nevertheless, the question of identification is a dynamic construct, which develops over time and can be changed through external influences<sup>13</sup>. In consequence, civic and ethnic identities are not always equally strong and may fail to reconcile with each other<sup>14</sup>. Although no clashing identities have been found during the analysis, one of the components is able to dominate the other. For instance, this can be the result of choice to give a higher importance to the civic or ethnic identity<sup>15</sup>.

### *Civic identity*

Likewise, civic identity develops over time: it can become stronger and external events have the power to shape civic identities<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, its elements can be promoted over time, next to a differing ethnic identity. Indispensable part of a successful accommodation is to reside on the country's territory<sup>17</sup> (residency, place of birth etc.) and to develop a sense of home for it<sup>18</sup>. This is described by "loving your country", calling it "home" and to be "proud of being a Ukrainian citizen". Ultimately, territory and citizenship are fundamental parts for the further development of a civic identity. Nevertheless, another vital part of civic identity is to exercise certain duties and responsibilities, which contribute to a successful integration into society as a Ukrainian citizen<sup>19</sup>. "Patriotism" on its own is not sufficient to make one a responsible individual<sup>20</sup>. A positive and proud attitude towards Ukraine or the use of national symbols has to be complemented by other elements, such as respect for Ukrainian values, (political) participation and (economic) contribution. Next to these elements, the most often named factor was that of the State language<sup>21</sup>. Knowing and practicing the Ukrainian language, as a minority in the country, is perceived by many as an essential part of integration. Consequently, as the empirical analysis also shows, language becomes one of the most important markers for a civic Ukrainian identity. On the other hand, the adoption of Ukrainian culture plays a much smaller role. Other cultural and ethnic elements besides national symbols in connection to a civic identity were not mentioned.

### *Ethnic Identity*

In contrast to civic identity, ethnic identity is less dynamic and negotiable. It depends foremost on heritage defined through ancestry<sup>22</sup>, physical appearance<sup>23</sup> and territory.<sup>24</sup> Further elements are that of the language at home<sup>25</sup> and culture/traditions practiced within the family<sup>26</sup>. Overall, it is a very unambiguous part of identity.<sup>27</sup> Yet, some flexibility can be part of one's ethnic identity, for example whenever new information is discovered about one's ancestors.<sup>28</sup> Above all, when different ethnicities are present within one's family tree, flexibility is possible to a greater degree. Ethnic identity can be manifold and does not need to be assigned to a single nation or a single group of people.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, this



identity can become a complex puzzle, composed out of various ethnic identities, out of which the individual can choose a personal priority<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, individuals can summarize their identity to incorporate different nation states within one concept, e.g. the “Slavic identity”<sup>31</sup>.

### *Subcategories*

One of the strongest markers for identity in the Ukrainian context is that of language. On the one hand, it is used as a tool to preserve the minority identity by speaking the mother tongue. Communication in this language, especially at home<sup>32</sup>, emphasizes the bond to past generations and is hence inevitably connected to one’s ethnic identity<sup>33</sup>. When the language is unknown and family ties or the connection to ancestral heritage are weak, a lower degree of identification is possible<sup>34</sup>. On the other hand, language is utilised to identify as a citizen of Ukraine by practicing and understanding the State language<sup>35</sup>. Overall, communities and interview participants understand the necessity of Ukrainian as a *lingua franca* and as an important factor for integration<sup>36</sup>. The decision to use (a) language(s) can either facilitate the reconciliation of identities<sup>37</sup>, or promote a specific identity in a certain context<sup>38</sup>. Consequently, practicing both or even multiple languages (minority languages and the State language), is an important element to reconcile ethnic and civic identities effectively. This is also reflected in the small subcategory of education, when two languages are studied in school<sup>39</sup>.

Likewise, territory and borders can be equally used as an element of ethnic and civic identification. Ethnicity and territory are significantly linked to a historical perspective through which a certain region is described as the native land of the local or Indigenous population<sup>40</sup>. This concept is less dynamic: while state borders can be subject to geopolitical discussions and changes, “native” territories and ethnic borders go beyond this attribution. Nevertheless, individuals are able to choose to stay in their “homeland” or to move on, which can result in a more flexible identification, if various ethnic identities are present<sup>41</sup>. In comparison, place of birth or residency on the state territory are an indispensable part of a civic identification, despite a differing ethnic identity<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, being born in Ukraine or living on its territory are indispensable parts of a civic Ukrainian identity. Altogether, interview participants regard state borders as a clear concept, which has to be preserved<sup>43</sup>. Accordingly, regional (ethnic) identities are able to reconcile with an inclusive national (civic) identity.

Congruently, the subcategory history is able to reconcile ethnic and civic features, as long as narratives are not controversially told, such as in the Ukrainian-Russian case<sup>44</sup>. Each minority relies on their ancestral history, describing the establishment of settlements or the connection to their native land and traditions<sup>45</sup>. At the same time, the narrative of Ukraine as an independent nation starting from Kievan Rus’ can be incorporated and appreciated<sup>46</sup>.

Next to the Hrushevsky Schema, symbols make up another strong component of the civic Ukrainian identity. Especially after Maidan and in the course of the conflict with Russia, symbols, such as the national anthem,<sup>47</sup> embroidery,<sup>48</sup> Ukrainian music<sup>49</sup> and movies,<sup>50</sup> became a magnet for and powerful

promoters of national identification.<sup>51</sup> Many came to feel much more strongly Ukrainian, realising their civic role in society<sup>52</sup> Therefore, not only the use of symbols, but an understanding of their meanings and implications became important.<sup>53</sup> To manifest a civic identity, neither symbolic slogans nor icons are perceived as sufficient tools on their own.<sup>54</sup> Being a citizen of Ukraine comes with responsibilities and contributions, such as paying taxes and an understanding of Ukrainian values.<sup>55</sup> In conclusion, civic symbols can foster different ethnic identities and contribute to an inclusive civic society, as long as they remain integrative and not divisive.

By contrast to symbols, traditions are connected to family ties and therefore entail a stronger ethnic component<sup>56</sup>. Performing folk traditions and customs, practicing annual holidays, and organizing family meetings or festivals are part of preserving culture and foster ethnic identification<sup>57</sup>. Although traditions can be used to differentiate between identities<sup>58</sup>, appreciating foreign traditions is also a possibility.<sup>59</sup> By sharing and participating in other traditional events, a mutual understanding or even combining those can be achieved.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, the ethnic component of this concept does not exclude understanding, appreciating and participating in Ukrainian traditions or holidays.<sup>61</sup> In sum, the openness of a society towards “foreign traditions” and “mutual enrichment” can contribute significantly to the reconciliation of identities.

Although religion is only mentioned as a marginal factor in reconciling identities, similarly to traditions, different orientations are considered an advantage. They can enrich local communities by sharing different approaches and foreign rituals in multiple languages, thus contributing to a multi-ethnic society.<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, official religious holidays are able to strengthen ties to a civic Ukrainian identity<sup>63</sup>.

### 5.3 Empirical results and discussion: reconciliation of identities

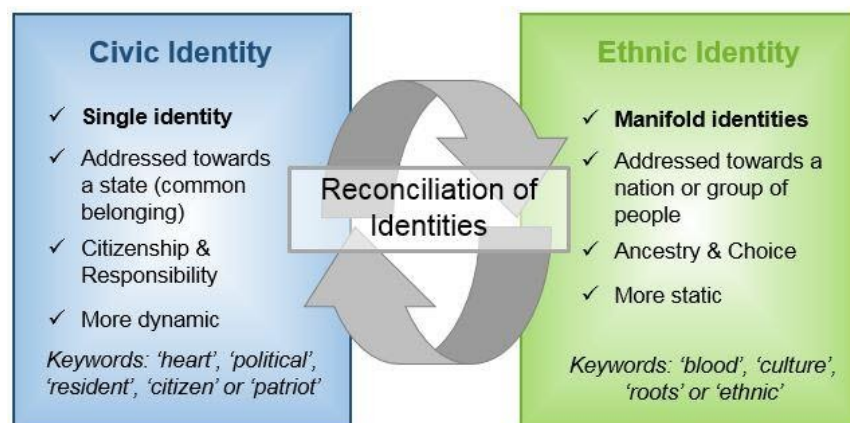


Fig. 1 Comprehensive overview: reconciliation of identities. (Does not claim to be an exhaustive model, but summarizes most important key points of the analysis)

The analysis proves that identities reconcile through different overlapping elements of civic and ethnic



identities, so long as neither is threatening or devaluating the other within an individual. Therefore, the reconciliation of (various) ethnic identities and another civic identity is possible, and does not necessarily result in a conflicting relationship. In the context of Ukraine, a distinct (sometimes mixed) ethnic identity (Russian, Belorussian, Hungarian, Polish, Moldovan, Romanian, Georgian, Croatian, German and Slovakian) and a civic Ukrainian identity are reconciled. Strong fundamentals to support this mechanism include knowledge of the State language next to the “mother” tongue/ “native” languages, as well as mixing and appreciating different traditions and sharing cultural events between communities on a regional and central level.

Nevertheless, a successful reconciliation can be threatened whenever the balance between civic and ethnic elements is destabilized by a stronger or weaker component. Although a larger proportion of the analysis describes an effective unification of ethnic and civic identities, in some cases a Ukrainian national identity prevails. In these circumstances, the ethnic identity is weak or not presented by interview participants, while a Ukrainian national identity is dominant. Reasons for such an outcome can be various, as identity is not only produced by external mechanisms. However, while keeping the events of 2014 in mind and looking at the strong promotion of the Ukrainian identity today, the following hypothesis may be established: whenever a dominant culture and ethnicity is strongly promoted by the majority of a society, soft power is exerted by the dominant identity. The results may vary from the reduction or abandonment of the less developed ethnic identity by an individual, to escalating conflicts between alienated groups.

In order to avoid the suppression of identities, while also keeping their role in conflict prevention in mind, effective inclusion and diversity management need to be governed by the state. As proven in the analysis, external factors and mechanisms can have a strong influence and shift identities in certain directions. Using these dynamics as an advantage can facilitate the efficient promotion of several identities in policies, and is therefore a vital part of the nation-building process. Finally, one should keep in mind that reconciliation of identities is not just an unconscious mechanism, but can also involve active decisions of each individual. Interview participants have acknowledged their responsibility as a Ukrainian citizen and willingness for integration, such as communication in the State language. Nevertheless, Ukraine’s pressure for distinctiveness and the necessity to restore self-esteem is still high after the conflict with Russia, which can be found in current governmental policies and within the country’s political orientation.

## **6. Data set II: reconciliation in Ukrainian policies: support or threat to identities?**

Legislation often delivers the most visible indicators on how questions of nationality, ethnicity and

minority–majority relations are addressed by a government (Pawłusz and Seliverstova, 2016). Therefore, policies can be viewed as a top-down mechanism regulating the ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of a society (Malloy, 2013). In order to determine whether the development and reconciliation of identities is supported or impeded, the following key questions are investigated against the background of guiding policies<sup>64</sup> for nation-building in Ukraine: 1) Does the Ukrainian ethnicity receive a comparative advantage over other ethnicities? 2) How is civic identity promoted? 3) Is development of identities and reconciliation of potentially clashing identities facilitated?

Acknowledging that Ukraine is a signatory to a number of international instruments promoting equality, tolerance and respect for diversity<sup>65</sup>, the critical analysis of the domestic legislation – in particular the guidelines on language, patriotic education and decommunisation (including national holidays) – aims to identify how policies address the issues of identity formation.

### **6.1 Language, education and decommunisation in nation-building**

Language is the defining element of a national group. A threat towards it is seen as a threat towards a group's existence (Kemp, 2001). Therefore, language can serve as an essential tool in nation-building to support various group identities and their culture. In post-communist transitions, the position of the state language is often particularly strengthened in order to address the effects of Russification (*Ibid.*, 2001). In the Ukrainian context, as already elaborated in the theoretical review, the Ukrainian language became an important signifier of its culture and key to the survival of Ukraine as a national and political community (Maksimovtosa, 2017). It is the most powerful tool of the process (*Ibid.*, 2017), and possibly the most important identity marker in the country (Polese, 2011). Language policies in education are especially instrumentalized for that purpose. However, education in itself is also a vital part of the development and preservation of identity, forming and transmitting the cultural, historical and linguistic identity of a group. Debates over education often become conflict-generating factors for questions of identity (Kemp, 2001), and shall therefore similarly be considered in the following analysis. Meanwhile, Ukraine has also renewed its efforts in the field of memory policy. Since the Maidan, these have been manifested through the implementation of decommunisation laws, leading to domestic unrest. In this context, new Ukrainian patriotism becomes a standard, while old communist narratives are replaced. Which direction recently introduced policies on decommunisation take on the reconciliation of identities will be analysed next to legislation on language and education.

*Q1: Does Ukrainian ethnicity receive a comparative advantage over other ethnicities?*

Ukrainian patriotic education, as defined by the Ministry of Education, serves “[...] to create a high patriotic consciousness, a sense of loyalty, (and) love for the motherland [...]” (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine *n.d.* a). The most important priority is the formation of the values of the individual towards the Ukrainian people, the Motherland, the state and the nation. Although the nation is included in this definition, it only follows after strong ethnic identification proclamations of the





“Ukrainian people”; not “people of Ukraine” (exclusive versus inclusive). Also, in relevant policy papers regarding this topic, the goal is to achieve “[...] favourable conditions for the development and self-realization of the Ukrainian youth [...]” (*Ibid.*). The term “Ukrainian youth” is chosen above the wording “youth of Ukraine” (or simply “youth”), as seen in various documents (Verkhovna Rada 2015d; Verkhovna Rada, 2015e). Furthermore, these policies rely strongly on the concept of Ukrainian ethnic identity with the underlying task to assert “[...] respect for the cultural and historical past of Ukraine” (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, *n.d.* a). Therefore, “the examples of the heroic struggle of the Ukrainian people for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine [...]” are instrumentalized (Verkhovna Rada 2015d). The modernization of Ukrainian educational institutions (museums, libraries, clubs, etc.) for children and youth to study the history and culture of Ukraine is also addressed (*Ibid.*). Moreover, the role of ethnic Ukrainian identity is promoted via the TV and radio, particularly through the popularization of Ukrainian history, language and culture. Finally, social advertising aimed at the national–patriotic education of children and young people is prescribed (*Ibid.*). Overall, patriotic education is carried out based on the “formation of national-cultural identity, national-patriotic world outlook, (and) preservation and development of spiritual and moral values of the Ukrainian people” (*Ibid.*). This represents a clear emphasis on Ukrainian culture, leaving out other nationalities from the discourse of nation and nation-building.

The document on ensuring the functioning of the Ukrainian language as the State language was signed in May 2019. It is based on ethnic elements, as it defines Ukrainian language as the main sign of the Ukrainian national identity – an identity that has been “historically formed [...] on its own ethnic territory [...]” (Verkhovna Rada, 2019). The overwhelming majority of the country’s population gave the official name to the State. The status of Ukrainian as the only state language is stressed, as well as the obligatory use of it throughout the territory of Ukraine. The state actively promotes the creation and distribution of works of culture and arts in Ukrainian, for example the publication of Ukrainian literature. Specifically, the promotion of the Ukrainian language is emphasised in connection to culture and traditions. The Law on Language in Ukraine is designed for “ensuring the development of the Ukrainian language for the strengthening of national identity, preservation of national culture, traditions, customs, historical memory and ensuring its further functioning as a nation-building factor of the Ukrainian nation” (*Ibid.*). Even preventing the “vulgarization” or the mixing of Ukrainian with other languages is mentioned. However, some special foreign language terms in certain sports may be used without translation.

There are a few more regulations emphasising the supremacy of Ukrainian ethnicity over other identities. This applies to the font size of languages on informational materials (posters, arts, entertainment), or information on goods and services. These shall be carried out in the state language. The use of other languages is allowed along with Ukrainian. However, text in another language cannot





be larger in size and font than the text of the state language. In this case, the rights of Indigenous people and national minorities of Ukraine are not separately mentioned. Overall, the language policy reflects the assumption that the Ukrainian language is an important marker of ethnic identity. Although its promotion is not carried out in obvious ways, the Law places the Ukrainian language, along with the development of Ukrainian culture, traditions, customs, etc., above all others present in the country. This approach is certainly not favourable for promoting the equality of cultures and the ethnic diversity of the nation.

Considering decommunisation and changes to traditions/holidays, there are few ethnic elements which emphasise the supremacy of the Ukrainian ethnic identity. One is the obligation of the State to promote the historical consciousness of the Ukrainian nation (Verkhovna Rada, 2015a). Holidays are established in order to “honour the [...] military traditions and victories of the Ukrainian people, promoting the further strengthening of patriotic spirit in society and in support of public initiative” (Verkhovna Rada, 1999). Particularly the document on decommunisation, which puts the Nazi regime and the Communist totalitarian regime on the same footing, aims to distance the country from its Soviet past. Ukrainian history before 1917 is highlighted by renaming towns, districts and streets, and returning to their historical names. It is also worth mentioning that the change of public holidays may have been aimed towards a differentiation between Ukrainian and Russian society. One example is the Russian “Victory Day” (9<sup>th</sup> of May), which was changed to the Ukrainian “Day of Victory over Nazism in the Second World War” (Verkhovna Rada, 2015b).

*Q2: How is civic identity promoted?*

Patriotic education is aimed at the “[...] readiness to perform civil and constitutional duty to protect the national interests, integrity, (and) independence of Ukraine, promoting it as a legal, democratic, social state” (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, *n.d.* a.). In civic terms, it is directed at the “[...] involvement of young people in its implementation” (Verkhovna Rada, 2016a). Interestingly, the term “Ukrainian youth” is never used in the context of civic identity formation: “[...] measures aimed at the revival of national patriotic education, strengthening of civic consciousness and active life position of the youth” (*Ibid.*); “[...] national and patriotic education of children and youth on the examples of the heroic struggle of the Ukrainian people for independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine [...]” (Verkhovna Rada, 2015e). Generally, patriotic education has the priority to develop a citizen as a “high moral person who nurtures Ukrainian traditions, spiritual values, [...] is ready to fulfil the duty to protect the Motherland, the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine” (*Ibid.*). Therefore, it can be argued that a civic identity goes hand in hand with certain Ukrainian ethnic elements. In regard to the last part of the quote, the prestige of military service, training and the system of pre-conscription for military training are also underlined (*Ibid.*). On the other hand, an active cooperation and involvement with the civil society is emphasized (Verkhovna Rada, 2016a) and aims



for increased self-organization and self-government of civil society institutions (*Ibid.*). Through cooperation with these (Verkhovna Rada, 2016b), the state establishes incentives for the participation of all groups. This element is more concretely directed toward an inclusive approach, but is overwhelmed by a rather exclusive civic concept, as described above.

In the Language Law, Ukrainian is described as “[...] being the basic system component of the Ukrainian civil nation” (Verkhovna Rada, 2019). As the only State language, it should serve as a *lingua franca* (language of inter-ethnic communication) and is “a guarantee of the protection of human rights for every Ukrainian citizen, regardless of his ethnic origin, and is also a factor in the unity and national security of Ukraine” (*Ibid.*). A great emphasis is put on language as an instrument for the unification of Ukrainian society. Furthermore, it is the duty of every citizen of Ukraine to know and speak the State language. To ensure this, the State creates appropriate conditions for studying Ukrainian for persons belonging to national minorities, foreigners, and stateless persons. On the one hand, this support ensures civic participation. On the other, this could also lead to the enforcement of Ukrainian language in education. In practice, policies include free Ukrainian language courses, but also the goal of “mastering the State language” through a system of education from pre-school to lifelong learning. Parts of the Law mention the permitted use of the official languages of the European Union and of English next to the Ukrainian language. This includes computer programs and their interface, the language of advertisements in print media, and scientific publications. The Russian language is not specifically mentioned, what makes it excluded and therefore discriminated against as a non-European language. The only languages the Law explicitly refers to are Indigenous languages, such as Crimean Tatar, which are regulated by the Law on Rights of the Indigenous People and National Minorities of Ukraine.

Largely, the Law helps to contribute to the civic engagement of all Ukrainian citizens in social life. However, an enforcement of civic identity through the Ukrainian language in education thus partly takes place, the politics of which thereby set the rule of “one state – one language”. The complete absence of references to the Russian language, but to the official languages of the European Union instead (albeit with only English explicitly mentioned), constitutes another example of discrimination.

Particularly in decommunisation and the implementation of national holidays, civic elements play a significant role. Public awareness about crimes of the past totalitarian regimes is a central element to decommunisation. Consciousness should be promoted through “[...] the establishment of respect for human dignity in society, human rights and fundamental freedoms, (and) the development of pluralism and democracy” (Verkhovna Rada, 2015a). The promotion of “patriotic spirit” and “pride in the State” is especially addressed by the implementation of the Defenders Day and the Day of Dignity and Freedom (Verkhovna Rada, 2018; Verkhovna Rada, 2014). National holidays are likewise used to promote patriotic education among young people (Verkhovna Rada, 2014). The implementation of new holidays is partly accompanied by commemorative, festive and cultural events, and a coverage of the



celebrations by the media. Furthermore, “Heaven’s Hundred Heroes” (civilian protestors killed during the Ukrainian Revolution in 2014) are celebrated on 20<sup>th</sup> of February with “the involvement of the public, the families of the fallen Heroes of the Heavenly Hundred, as well as active participants in the revolutionary events“ (Verkhovna Rada, 2015c). Every citizen can take part in the celebrations.

*Q3: Are the development and reconciliation of identities facilitated?*

Overall, the question of identities is rarely addressed in policies and aims either at ethnic or civic nation-building. For example, the strong statement of the Ministry of Education on patriotic education that a “tolerant attitude towards other peoples, cultures and traditions – affirming humanistic morality as the basis of civil society” (Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, *n.d.* a) should be considered, is close to the concept of reconciliation. However, an application of this cannot be found within the analysed policy documents. “Openness” and “equality of opportunity” is only mentioned in two documents (Verkhovna Rada 2015e; Verkhovna Rada 2016a), referring to cooperation with the European Union and to the system of pan-European principles (Verkhovna Rada 2016a).

In the Language Law of May 2019, various references to the rights of “the Indigenous People and National Minorities of Ukraine” exist. Most importantly, the Law on the Procedure for Implementing the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and National Minorities of Ukraine determines the application of the new Language Law. At first glance, the restrictions on minority languages in Ukraine do not seem to be severe. For example, mass printed media exclusively issued in languages of Indigenous people do not need to follow the rule that mass media have to be distributed in the State language. The same principle applies to bookstores. The problem here is the exclusiveness and separation of one language from another. All stores not exclusively distributing Ukrainian material (unless an Indigenous language is exclusively presented) have to have at least 50% of their books in Ukrainian, while printed mass media shall be issued in the State language. The same division applies for education: “Persons belonging to the Indigenous peoples of Ukraine are guaranteed the right to study in communal educational institutions for obtaining pre-school (primary education) and general secondary education, along with the State language [...]. This right is exercised through the creation, in accordance with the law, of separate classes (groups) with the language of the respective Indigenous people of Ukraine [...]” (Verkhovna Rada 2019). Therefore, the right to choose an education in a native language is part of reconciling identity, but the separation of classes is counterproductive. Guiding documents and recommendations of human rights bodies, such as the Council of Europe, give examples in this direction. For instance, the FCNM describes integrated education and inter-cultural dialogue as a key element. Meanwhile, in Ukraine, the study of minority languages is not promoted among the population, which represents a significant lack. Moreover, the external evaluation for entrance examinations to universities in the state language presents another obstacle.

Other regulations only partly fostering the reconciliation of identities can be also found. In most cases,

the use of other languages constitutes exception and needs to be justified. For instance, the distribution of governmental election campaign materials in other languages is only permitted in certain cities, towns or villages. The use of other languages during cultural events is permitted, if it is justified by the artist or specified by the above-mentioned law on minorities (songs and records are excluded). To conclude, the Language Law does not rely on a clear empowerment of reconciled identities, nor takes an interest in bilingual media newspapers, such as distributed in the regions of Zakarpattia and Chernivtsi.

To the contrary, in decommunisation and the creation of new holidays (or changes to holidays), reconciled identities are mostly absent. As described above, their implementation relies almost exclusively on ethnic and civic components. Only the restoration of historical place names, including those in Indigenous languages, emphasizes a common past and tries to reconcile different identities.

Overall, the reviewed instruments carry a risk of intensifying the clash between ethnic identities. The reinforcement of conflicts due to an approach of eradication of identities and inequality between cultural identities thus becomes a possibility. If the hypothesis emphasizing the risks resulting from the over promotion of the majority's ethnic identity remains valid, a clash between ethnic identities is likely with resulting diversity reduction and frustration among minorities.

## **6.2 Empirical results and discussion: the reconciliation of identities in Ukrainian policies**

Although the Ministry of Education takes notice of other identities, no other ethnicities are mentioned or empowered as part of society in the evaluated policy documents. Here, the focus lies on the attitude towards “Ukrainian people” in ethnic terms, while the “youth” is again generalised in civic terms, whenever actions such as constitutional duties are required. Civic components also include the adaption of Ukrainian traditions and culture, therefore simultaneously emphasising ethnic Ukrainian identity as a basis for participation in society. Patriotic education clearly highlights the Ukrainian ethnicity over other ethnicities, promotes civic identity in a rather exclusive way, and does not contribute to reconciliation with other identities.

The Law on Language is a more complex matter, as it is entangled with many other legislative acts. Nevertheless, based on the analysis of only this document, it is obvious that the Ukrainian language is used as an important marker of Ukrainian civic identity. This identity requires citizens to speak the state language and promotes official European languages, while differentiating against Russian at the same time. Additionally, the promotion of Ukrainian culture above others is emphasised. For other identities, the Law refers to the Law on the Procedure for Implementing the Rights of Indigenous People and National Minorities of Ukraine. However, more of a separation than a reconciliation is demonstrated, especially in education, distribution of media and cultural events.



Decommunisation, deriving from ethnic Ukrainian identity, mainly emphasises an inclusive civic identity in holidays, but also distances Ukraine from the Soviet past and Russia. Other identities are nowhere specifically facilitated and newly introduced holidays are only aimed at civic Ukrainian identity.

Overall, none of the analysed policies have a clear aim for the facilitation of different identities, nor are able to reconcile different ethnic identities within a civic identity. All of them are based on more or less exclusive Ukrainian ethnic or civic identity, disregarding the possibility of clashing identities.

## **7. Conclusion and final recommendations: empirical findings, theoretical insights, possibilities for reform**

Although this paper has covered a wide range of issues related to nation-building and identity in post-2014 Ukraine, it has only scratched the surface of contemporary diversity issues in the country. Only a few of numerous governmental documents / policies could be included within this framework. Consequently, the present overview is not exhaustive, but sufficient enough to propose at least provisional conclusions and provide a satisfactory overview on the reconciliation of identities and nation-building in Ukraine.

As described in the first part of the paper, Ukrainian nation-building has relied since 1991 on foreign and domestic policies with a focus on security, economy, language, education, symbols and history. More recent focal points are the dispute over the Orthodox Church and the decentralization reform. Since the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in Donbas, radical policies of language, education and decommunisation have particularly increased the distinction of the “Other” towards Russia, which predominantly shapes the process of nation-building. Therefore, the crisis does not only concern security issues at the frontlines, but influences the internal political landscape and moves it towards a more radically anti-Russian Ukrainisation, without considering the effects it may have on other national minorities.

Is the reconciliation of identities feasible in these circumstances? As the present analysis has shown, a Ukrainian civic identity and different ethnic identities are reconciled by individuals. In this process, it is understood that manifold ethnic features are united with a single civic identity, forming an overarching identity. Fundamentals to support this mechanism include multilingual and multicultural features of each individual. Naturally, part of an identity is the civic identification with the Ukrainian nation, and not only ethnic features of the minority group. Therefore, interview participants have acknowledged their responsibility as a Ukrainian citizen and willingness for integration. Rather than eradicating the balance between ethnic and civic identities, individuals with other identities should be empowered to build bridges to their communities, and have to be recognized for their achievements in



reconciling their ethnic features with the civic values of Ukraine's society. However, successful reconciliation can be threatened whenever this balance is destabilized, and one identity is questioned or suppressed by another, as proposed by this analysis.

This leads us to the necessity of facilitating the recognition of identities in legislation, which regulates ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of the nation through a top-down mechanism. According to the present analysis, no existing instruments facilitate identities or reconciliation of clashing ethnic identities in Ukrainian policies. To the contrary, the promotion of civic identity entails several restrictions and relies on Ukrainian ethnic elements. The analysed documents contain serious impediments, which hinder the development of other ethnic identities alongside the Ukrainian one. Other identities either do not receive any attention or are not sufficiently supported. Moreover, such development is further hindered by an exclusive civic conceptualization: while a civic involvement is demanded and promoted, ethnic elements of minority groups are not taken into consideration or included. Therefore, a fear about the exclusion of diversity from the political processes is significant. Although Ukraine's current situation remains stable, existing policies reflect how ethnic tolerance has been strained by the crisis, reinforcing Ukrainian identity and Ukrainisation of all ethnic minorities. Although nationalism is not aggressively promoted, the current state of defensive nationalism has the potential to put the country's unique cultural heterogeneity at stake.

Albeit further research on policy guidelines is necessary in order to build efficient strategies for the management of identities, current developments show that the government's alleged "need" to combat Russian aggression continuously endangers diversity. Particularly, laws and issues concerning language and education are placed at the centre of the ongoing debate. An example of this is bill No. 0901, which divides Indigenous, European and non-European languages artificially. The Law on Language in Secondary Education has been seen as controversial due to regulations discriminating against Russian language and the unreasonable haste to switch to Ukrainian language in a short amount of time<sup>66</sup>.

In order to avoid prejudices, discriminatory ideologies and social conflicts, policies have to emphasize the concept of diversity in Ukraine. Against this background, identities need to be reconciled in an overarching civic system without suppression of ethnic cultures, so as to operate efficiently as a mechanism for conflict prevention. If one culture is promoted as dominant, the diversity of the population is threatened. Moreover, frustration among minority groups may become an unavoidable security issue, while the politicization and securitization of minorities in the nation-building process hold a particularly high conflictual potential within the internal political landscape. A group's identity, with its culture, language and religion should not only be recognized, but also supported by the authorities (Baldwin *et al.*, 2007). Tools for this include not only efficient policies, but also dialogue, confidence-building, allocation of resources and a system of accountability for effective preventative actions (Van der Stoel, 1999). By focusing discussions on policy, legislation, human rights, government



practices and putting the individual at the centre, issues can be resolved in a pragmatic and co-operative manner (Kemp, 2001).

In conclusion, a reconciliation of identities is already happening in Ukraine. However, this tendency needs to be enhanced and maintained, not eradicated – something which the government needs to include as a vital part of its policies of nation-building. The majority and the minority alike need to find a means of reciprocal accommodation that enriches all of society. According to the concept of integration, the minority can maintain its distinctive identity without threatening the integrity of the State, while also being part of the whole of society at the same time (*Ibid.*). Ukraine has a unique chance to develop this model of accommodating and reconciling identities, and thus fostering stability and cohesion as a multi-ethnic State.





## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The identification with Europe in a political and cultural sense, including values such as freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and the respect of Human Rights.

<sup>2</sup> The identification with political and cultural Slavic values, such as conservatism and socialism, and the presence of moral, spiritual and religious values.

<sup>3</sup> First East Slavic state, founded by the Viking Oleg (ruler of Novgorod) from about 879, seizing Kiev and Smolensk in 882 (Augustyn *et al.*, *n.d.*)

<sup>4</sup> Hetman state or Hetmanate was the Ukrainian Cossack state from 1648 to 1782. “It came into existence as a result of the Cossack-Polish War and the alliance of the registered Cossacks [...]”. (Okinshevych and Zhukovsky, 1989)

<sup>5</sup> 1) How do you identify yourself? 2) Do you feel “Ukrainian”? Why? 3) What connects you with Ukraine? 4) Were there any situations you felt uncomfortable with your identity in Ukraine? 5) What do you think about the current nationalism in Ukraine? 6) What could be improved and done better?

<sup>6</sup> Age, region and gender.

<sup>7</sup> Interviews quoted in the present Research Paper were lightly edited in order to protect the interviewees’ privacy and guarantee coherence. Nevertheless, all efforts have been made to keep them as close to the original as possible.

<sup>8</sup> “By blood, I am Moldovan, in my heart I am Ukrainian.” / “I feel ethnically Romanian and politically Ukrainian.” / “[...] I feel like a citizen of Ukraine, but Russian culture is very dear to me.” / “I am a Ukrainian citizen with Russian roots.” / “I feel Ukrainian. But I feel part of Georgian in my identity.” / “I am a citizen of Ukraine. But I cannot say I am Ukrainian.”

<sup>9</sup> “But we are aware of our common belonging to the state of Ukraine.” / “Moreover, I very clearly share this and do not feel politically Romanian at all.”

<sup>10</sup> “There are no problems like these at all. As concerns culture, I often enjoy Ukrainian performances in the Ukrainian language, as well as in Hungarian. I love it and often go to all sorts of events that are held by both Ukrainian and Hungarian parties.”

<sup>11</sup> “Here, for example, now, today, this is most likely an advantage. How many languages do you know, so many times you are human.”

<sup>12</sup> “Therefore, one of my credos is to do everything that depends on me to create friendship between Ukraine and Romania.”

<sup>13</sup> “When these events took place, I had a crazy identity crisis, because I had never questioned my own identity before.”

<sup>14</sup> “I feel Ukrainian. I feel that way, because being Ukrainian means more than being Russian.”

<sup>15</sup> “Mother is Ukrainian–Romanian, and father is Polish–Hungarian. [...] I am not Polish, nor Hungarian. I am Ukrainian!”

<sup>16</sup> “I was a Soviet man, and suddenly a new state appeared – Ukraine. And, to be honest, with my mind – I immediately took it, but with my heart – not immediately. The heart had to go through a certain period.” / “The highest level of national identity, I felt quite recently, that is, 5 years ago.” / “And after the Maidan, I realized that I was Ukrainian. [...] Before Maidan, I did not ask myself this question.” / “Patriotism is now quite high in Ukraine. And it is very important, especially when the country is in a state of war.” / “Before that, it was just my national anthem, just because they told me that it was. So, at that moment, I felt that it was so intensely mine that I was ready to follow to the end. This was the moment when I felt myself fully a political Ukrainian – with my mind and heart.” / “I identify as a Ukrainian. I was affirmed in this opinion just since the beginning of the war, but on the other hand my idea of what it means to be a Ukrainian, a part of the Ukrainian nation – it changed significantly.”

<sup>17</sup> “I feel like a Ukrainian, definitely. I live here, I work here, I studied here. [...] I like it at home, I like my city.” / “I want to live in my country. I want my children to live there in the future. I love my country.”

<sup>18</sup> “Ukrainians want Ukraine to be a strong and independent, highly developed state. [...] To be proud that I am Ukrainian.” / “One’s responsibility is to love Ukraine. And as Shevchenko said, to love, respect and not to



disgrace.” / “Well, there is some identification: you go there yourself, work, learn.” / “I am a civil servant, I have vowed the oath of allegiance to Ukraine and am a Ukrainian patriot.”

<sup>19</sup> “But as a citizen of Ukraine, I also have certain duties according to my conscience towards Ukraine.” / “Responsibilities of Ukrainians, I believe. Not to disgrace your country, if it is on a serious level. And so, do not disgrace your village, your city.” / “To be Ukrainian also means to think about the development of your country in economic, political and other fields.”

<sup>20</sup> “And the realization of what it means to be a Ukrainian should change. It is not only wearing an embroidered shirt, but also paying taxes, for example, cleaning up after yourself. I understand that wearing an embroidered shirt is very important, [...]” / “[...] it’s not to go to Maidan and shout: “I am Ukrainian!” and “Glory to Ukraine!”. [...] In order to manifest patriotism – you need to do something; that is, these words must be fixed by something.”

<sup>21</sup> “But I understand that speaking in a certain language has its purpose. I switched by means of protection. It plays an important role in integration.” / “[...] I think that if you are a minor and your native language is Romanian or Hungarian, then you still need to know the language of the country in which you live.” / “However, if I would like to get a citizenship in Italy, for instance, I would need to speak the language. Why should we be an exception? In private life, you can speak any language.” / “Now we have a very problematic language issue. Hungary is not very nice, because it insists that our people who live in Ukraine should not learn Ukrainian. This is not correct, it would not be anywhere like this. [...]”

<sup>22</sup> “Let me first start with the story of my grandmother. My grandmother was born in Austria-Hungary, married in Romania and gave birth to her children there.” / “My father is Hungarian.” / “I knew that I my grandparents have a Russian background, but then my parents are Ukrainian.”

<sup>23</sup> “But I saw them on [my grandmother’s] face, these moles. This is not typical for Hungarians or Ukrainians. This is mainly typical of Romanians.”

<sup>24</sup> “I identify myself more as a Russian, because my parents were Russian and I live in a region where more Russians live.”

<sup>25</sup> “I can freely say that I was born Hungarian and communicate in Hungarian.” / “I don’t know the language. I did not have a strong connection with my Georgian relatives. Therefore, it is only a small part of me.”

<sup>26</sup> “We do not forget our (traditions), but as Ukrainians we also celebrate. Learn about the foreign and do not forget yours.”

<sup>27</sup> “I am a representative of the Moldavian national minority [...]. I identify myself as a successor of the ‘Moldavian minority.’”

<sup>28</sup> “I have identified myself as a Moldovan until I was 20–28 years old. And today I identify as Romanian. Because I have learned that my grandmothers and grandfathers on both sides of themselves had always been considered Romanians.”

<sup>29</sup> “This is a complex issue. My mother is Russian, and my father is Polish. I love Ukraine.” / “I also feel that I belong to the Moldovan culture, to the Romanian culture, to the Polish culture, also to the Belorussian and Russian.”

<sup>30</sup> “I consider myself a Ukrainian, but my mother was born in the lineage of a Ukrainian, semi-Romanian family. And my dad has some Polish roots and a little Hungarian. So, a lot of things are mixed, but I consider myself a Ukrainian. Mama is Ukrainian–Romanian, and father is Polish–Hungarian.” / “On my mother’s side I have a grandmother, a grandfather who are Hungarian. Great-grandparents, great-grandfathers, from one of the sides, are Croats, Germans, Slovaks and Hungarians. On my dad’s side, my grandmother was Romanian. [...] And my grandfather was a Pole. And my father says he is Ukrainian. What about me? I do not know. A mixture of a bulldog with a rhinoceros. [...] I cannot specifically identify myself.”

<sup>31</sup> “In my family, everyone identifies himself as a member of the Soviet, Slavic peoples. There were Russians, there were Belarusians, there were Ukrainians. My great-grandfather was half Moldovan. He was from the Odessa region [...].”

<sup>32</sup> “[...] at home we spoke Hungarian most of the time.” / “[...] at the household level, our language was preserved.” / “[...] at home we speak Hungarian.”

<sup>33</sup> “We have preserved the language and traditions that our great-grandfather followed.” / “I was raised in a family where mom and dad were at work. Grandma dealt with us. She was Hungarian and spoke Hungarian to us.”



<sup>34</sup> “I don't know the language. I did not have a strong connection with my Georgian relatives, therefore it is only small part of me.”

<sup>35</sup> “And, of course as a Ukrainian, citizen, I am for the Ukrainian language and I am all, all Ukrainian.” / “Still, the factor of the language makes you Ukrainian by self-identification or a citizen of Ukraine – if you can understand the Ukrainian language, at least.”

<sup>36</sup> “They [ethnic groups in Ukraine] don't seem to speak Ukrainian on an everyday basis, but we all understand it and this is a very important factor. It is like a lingua franca. And this is important, because before that, in Ukraine, the lingua franca was Russian. And now Ukrainian is becoming more frequent and this is an important integration factor.”

<sup>37</sup> “How many languages you know, so many times you are human.”

<sup>38</sup> “I think it is right to have only Ukrainian in Ukraine.” / “I know Romanian, I speak it, I understand it and can speak it, but still, everyone speaks Ukrainian to me. This is not uncomfortable. On the contrary, I am proud of it.”

<sup>39</sup> “I studied both Hungarian and Ukrainian. For two years I went to a Ukrainian kindergarten, but at home we spoke Hungarian most of the time.”

<sup>40</sup> “My kind have always lived on this territory.” / “[...] an autochthonous population, they have always lived there, they just changed the boundaries.”

<sup>41</sup> “But after that I moved away from Donetsk and, moreover, I didn't choose southern Ukraine for life. [...] Now I do not identify myself with any region.”

<sup>42</sup> “I also think that I personally have to live in Ukraine for this feeling.” / But the main thing is, because I was born in Ukraine.” / “I was born in eastern Ukraine, then grew up in the Odessa region.” / “As Ukrainian, first of all. [...] I was born in Ukraine near Kiev, I live in Kiev, I work in Kiev.”

<sup>43</sup> “[...] the borders of the state must be preserved, there must be respect from its neighbors, there must be support from the world community.” / “We know that state borders are very clear.”

<sup>44</sup> “In my opinion, Ukraine, as a nation, is very ancient and we throughout the history prove that Russia itself went from Kievan Rus'.” / “This reminds us of our history, because we have forgotten it. We must learn the history of Kievan Rus, the history of the Cossacks.”

<sup>45</sup> “Our settlement was founded by refugees. [...]” / “Our region is hot and people have always herded lambs and grown grapes. That is to say, this is still part of us.”

<sup>46</sup> “I adore Ukrainian films [...] most importantly, those in which Ukrainian history is described.”

<sup>47</sup> “I first began to sing the national anthem of Ukraine. [...] I realized this is my anthem, for which I am ready to die.”

<sup>48</sup> “In my case, I also practice embroidery and it is also an important part for me.”

<sup>49</sup> “Ukrainian music is simply unmatched, and it has only just begun to develop. They write again, sing again.”

<sup>50</sup> “I adore Ukrainian films shot by Ukrainian directors. With Ukrainian actors. [...]”

<sup>51</sup> “[...] Ukraine, on the contrary, is considered fashionable today – the Ukrainian shirt, the Ukrainian language.” / “Let me watch Ukrainian movies. Yes, even if they are not so good, but I want to watch them.”

<sup>52</sup> “If before that, it was just my national anthem, just because they told me that it was. So, at that moment, I felt that it was so intensely mine that I was ready to follow to the end. This was the moment when I felt myself fully a political Ukrainian – with my mind and heart.”

<sup>53</sup> “This [Ukrainian music and dress] is part of my identity, [...] but it is not what makes me Ukrainian.”

<sup>54</sup> “[...] it's not just going to Maidan and shouting ‘I am Ukrainian!’ and ‘Glory to Ukraine!’. I understand the meaning of all these words, but, all the same, words cannot help here. In order to manifest patriotism you need to do something – that is, these words must be grounded in something.”

<sup>55</sup> “And the understanding of what it means to be a Ukrainian should change. It is not only wearing an embroidered shirt, but also paying taxes, for example, cleaning up after yourself [...]”

<sup>56</sup> “We have preserved the language and traditions that our great-grandfathers followed.”

<sup>57</sup> “Firstly, I still go to my parents in the village for all the holidays. And there we celebrate everything! Starting from Easter, New Year, Old New Year according to all folk traditions, and so on and so forth.” / “Our region is hot and people there have always herded lambs and grown grapes. That is to say, this is still part of us. We all have sheep, grow grapes, farm cattle. Our region loves the land very much; this means they are used to working



the land. Wherever we go, we are hard workers.” / “Of course, a lot of traditions. For example, in our culture there is a tradition of joint celebrations. Since childhood, I remember when our big family was meeting at the table, about fifteen people.”

<sup>58</sup> “I have only celebrated holidays before in Ukraine. When I came to Russia, it was strange to me how they celebrated Easter.”

<sup>59</sup> “Once a year we will have a village day to which we invite guests from neighboring Moldova and Gagauz.”

<sup>60</sup> “We do not forget our [traditions], but Ukrainian ones we also celebrate. Learn about the foreign and do not forget yours.”

<sup>61</sup> “There are many traditions that help to identify with Ukraine and be Ukrainian. Starting from some religious holidays, ending with the Ukrainian worldview.”

<sup>62</sup> “When big holidays come and we have services in the church, you can hear German prayers, Slovak prayers, Indian prayers, Ukrainian prayers, Hungarian prayers, Russian prayers and French prayers. The service is held in eight languages.”

<sup>63</sup> “There are many traditions that help us identify with Ukraine and be Ukrainian. Starting from some religious holidays, ending with the Ukrainian worldview.”

<sup>64</sup> All legal acts and policy documents discussed in the text are listed in references.

<sup>65</sup> Paragraph 33 of the Copenhagen Document to “protect the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of national minorities on their territory and create conditions for the promotion of that identity”. (OSCE 1990, para. 33) / Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM, 1995) / European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ECRML, 1966).

<sup>66</sup> The law that came into force on 28 September 2020 intends to increase the use of Ukrainian language in education. Schools teaching in “European” minority languages are expected to provide up to 60% of class time in Ukrainian at the high school level, after a three-year transition period. Schools teaching in “non-European” languages (including Russian), in turn, are expected to provide 80% of class time in the Ukrainian language from 5th grade onwards, with immediate effect.



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