

## **UKRAINIAN NATIONAL IDENTITY IN CONDITIONS OF WAR**

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*The Russian large-scale armed aggression against Ukraine has unprecedentedly strengthened the importance of national identity as one of the most important factors of national stability. It is identity that has become the basis on which the ability of Ukrainians to long-term, nationwide and consolidated resistance was formed. The study of Ukrainian national identity allows us to understand how deep values, common historical narratives and ideas about the nation were transformed into the practical force of national resistance, and at the same time, how the war transformed Ukrainian national identity itself.*

*The war not only posed extremely difficult challenges to the Ukrainian nation, but also gave a powerful impetus to the strengthening and development of modern Ukrainian national identity, its modernization and integration into broader European and world contexts.*

*During the war, Ukrainian national identity underwent profound changes. These changes affected the self-awareness of citizens, their system of values, models of collective behavior and ideas about the future of the state. In this context, Ukrainian national identity appears not only as a cultural or historical, but also as a socio-political phenomenon, which is actively formed under the influence of existential threats.*

*The article analyzes the determining factors of strengthening and development of Ukrainian national identity: the consolidation of society around the common goal of protecting statehood, a sharp increase in trust in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, a large-scale volunteer movement, a rethinking of narratives of historical memory, a massive return of interest in the Ukrainian language, culture and symbolics. The national resistance, during which Ukrainian society actively builds its own subjectivity through distancing itself from the society of the aggressor state, strengthening the pro-European and democratic vectors of its development, is of particular importance in the process of forming modern Ukrainian national identity.*

**Key words:** national identity, national stability, Ukrainian people, society, war, Russian armed aggression.

## **Мартинюк Р. С., Дацюк О. О., Клебан В. Л. Українська національна ідентичність в умовах війни**

Російська широкомасштабна збройна агресія проти України безпрецедентно посилила значення національної ідентичності як одного з найважливіших чинників національної стійкості. Саме ідентичність стала тим підґрунтям, на якому сформувалася здатність українців до тривалого, всенародного та консолідованого опору. Дослідження української національної ідентичності дозволяє зрозуміти, як глибинні цінності, спільні історичні наративи та уявлення про націю трансформувалися у практичну силу національного спротиву, і водночас, – як війна трансформувала саму українську національну ідентичність.

Війна не лише поставила українську націю перед надзвичайно складними викликами, а й дала потужний імпульс для зміцнення і розвитку сучасної української національної ідентичності, її модернізації та інтеграції у ширші європейський та світовий контексти.

У період війни українська національна ідентичність зазнала глибинних змін. Ці зміни вплинули на самоусвідомлення громадян, систему їхніх цінностей, моделі колективної поведінки та уявлення про майбутнє держави. У цьому контексті українська національна ідентичність постає не лише як культурний чи історичний, а й як громадсько-політичний феномен, який активно формується під впливом екзистенційних загроз.

У статті проаналізовано визначальні чинники зміцнення та розвитку української національної ідентичності: консолідацію суспільства навколо спільної мети захисту державності, різке зростання довіри до Збройних Сил України, масштабний волонтерський рух, переосмислення наративів історичної пам'яті, масове повернення інтересу до української мови, культури та символів. Особливе значення у процесі формування сучасної української національної ідентичності має національний спротив, за якого українське суспільство активно вибудовує власну суб'єктність через відмежування від суспільства держави-агресора, посилення проєвропейського та демократичного векторів свого розвитку.

**Ключові слова:** національна ідентичність, національна стійкість, український народ, суспільство, війна, російська збройна агресія.

**Relevance of the research.** The research of Ukrainian national identity in war conditions is extremely important for ensuring the national security of Ukraine. The relevance of the research of this phenomenon is due to the processes of deep socio-cultural and political transformations that are currently taking place in Ukraine. The events of 2014–2022, in particular the annexation of Crimea, hybrid aggression, as well as large-scale invasion in 2022, accelerated the revaluation by Ukrainians of their historical memory, symbols (language, memory, symbolics) and value orientations. National identity has become the main catalyst for social consolidation. By causing high social cohesion and mobilizing resources for defense, it has given rise to a large-scale volunteer movement. In conditions of existential danger, national identity significantly affects the psychological stability of citizens, reducing their vulnerability to panic moods. At the state-political level, identity ensures the legitimacy of state power and its decisions in the field of national security and defense, contributes to the effective coordination of actions of state institutions and ensures the achievement of public

consensus on issues that are fundamental to the state and society. Identity has enabled the formation of an effective information shield against external propaganda, increasing trust in national mass media. In the field of international relations, the distinct identity of Ukraine as a nation waging a liberation struggle for its sovereign existence and the values of democracy has become the most important argument in gaining external support. The scientific research of Ukrainian national identity is of strategic importance, as it provides an understanding of the sources and mechanisms of social stability, the consolidation of the population around fundamental ideas and values, the formation of its readiness for defense and self-sacrifice, and the criteria for the effectiveness of state policy in the field of national security and defense in conditions of existential threat.

**The purpose of the article** is to investigate the role of Ukrainian national identity in ensuring the national stability of Ukraine in conditions of war and the impact of the Russian large-scale armed invasion on the transformation of Ukrainian national identity itself.

**Analysis of recent research and published works.** Recent research of the phenomenon of Ukrainian national identity – in particular, the works of V. Kulyk ("What have we learned about ethnonational identities in Ukraine?"), Yu. Polishchuk ("Philosophy of national identity in the postmodern era"), S. Boyko ("Formation of national identity of Ukrainian youth in the conditions of the Russian-Ukrainian war"), O. Onukh and H. Hale ("The Zelensky effect"), as well as analytical reviews of Ukrainian and international research centers – indicate that the large-scale war has become a powerful factor in strengthening Ukrainian national identity. In their works, scholars emphasize the strengthening of the sense of national belonging, civic solidarity, the transformation of linguistic and cultural practices, and the departure from Russian-imperial narratives. Researchers also point to the complex structure of modern Ukrainian national identity. At the same time, the scientific discourse emphasizes the need for further research into the phenomenon of Ukrainian national identity for a deeper understanding of the processes of transformation of Ukrainian society associated with it.

**Presentation of the main material of the research.** The Russian large-scale armed aggression against Ukraine created conditions for a deep transformation of Ukrainian society, in which national identity became a determining resource for national stability and consolidation of society [3]. It was the war that activated the hidden mechanisms of self-awareness of Ukrainians and formed a new type of their national identity. In the conditions of war, national identity emerged not only as a cultural or social phenomenon, but also as a determining resource for the survival, stability and strategic development of Ukraine.

According to paragraph 16 of Article 1 of the Law of Ukraine "On the basic principles of state policy in the sphere of establishing Ukrainian national and civic identity" of December 13, 2022, Ukrainian national

identity is a person's stable awareness of belonging to the Ukrainian nation as a distinctive community, united by a name, symbols, geographical and ethnosocial origin, historical memory, a complex of spiritual and cultural values, in particular the Ukrainian language and folk traditions [2]. National identity consolidates society, ensuring its internal unity and cohesion, ideological motivation for resistance and psychological readiness for self-defense. Currently, in conditions of an existential threat to the very existence of the Ukrainian people and its statehood, caused by the Russian large-scale armed invasion, the sense of belonging to the Ukrainian nation has increased many times over and directly affects the behavior and life of every person in general.

National identity not only determines the cultural identity of the nation, but also forms the ability of society to resist, unite and recover from crises. In the current conditions of the war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, national identity has become a strategic resource that ensures not only the moral unity of the Ukrainian people, but also its real ability to withstand and win the war.

At the time of the Revolution of Dignity, Ukrainian national identity was already based on civic values, a sense of dignity, freedom, and subjectivity. After the Russian invasion, these values became the basis for rapid and voluntary mobilization, a high level of willingness of the population to support the Armed Forces of Ukraine, a unique wave of volunteerism that covered all social groups, and the formation of an atmosphere of mutual assistance and social cohesion. The social consolidation that emerged on the basis of national identity ensured the stability of the state in the first and most crucial weeks of the war. National identity became the institutional support of statehood. Contrary to the expectations of Russian strategists, there was no collapse of state power, and its institutions fully retained their functionality.

National identity allowed Ukrainian society to overcome the fear of Russian large-scale armed aggression. The

awareness of oneself as part of the European democratic community, the feeling of the historical struggle for independence, and the moral and psychological devotion to the idea of freedom led to an increase in the readiness for self-sacrifice and a categorical refusal to surrender to the enemy, who had an obvious military advantage. The psychological resilience of Ukrainians was one of the reasons for the failure of Russian plans to quickly seize Kyiv and achieve "paralysis" of the Ukrainian military and political leadership.

The influence of historical memory on the ability of the Ukrainian people to resist was important. Historical ideas about the previous stages of the struggle for independence – from the liberation struggles of the 20th century to the events of the Revolution of Dignity – formed in Ukrainian society an understanding of the value of national statehood, readiness for armed defense of freedom, and a categorical rejection of the idea of the revival of the Russian Empire. Those historical narratives strengthened the internal motivation for volunteers, national self-awareness, and the readiness of society to resist occupation.

Although modern Ukrainian identity is civic-political in content, the linguistic and cultural factor played an important role in its establishment. The massive rethinking of the meaning of the Ukrainian language, culture, and symbolics strengthened the sense of community between different regions of Ukraine, reduced internal social divisions, and led to a sharp increase in self-identification as Ukrainians regardless of regional origin. As a result, the Russian strategy of "split along linguistic lines" proved ineffective and did not receive support among the Ukrainian population.

Ukrainian national identity became the driving force of resistance to the enemy from civil society. In critical conditions, national identity ensured the ability of society to self-organize quickly and effectively, the emergence of numerous volunteer formations, and the creation of logistical, humanitarian,

medical, and information volunteer networks. Those networks significantly increased the effectiveness of defense, often compensating for the lack of material resources in the initial stages of the war.

National identity has become the content basis of Ukrainian strategic communications aimed at mobilizing the population, forming a positive international image of Ukraine, securing external support, and countering Russian information operations.

A clear, value-rich image of the Ukrainian nation as a community engaged in an existential struggle for its survival and freedom has contributed to an unprecedented level of international military, humanitarian, and financial support for Ukraine.

At the same time, the Russian armed aggression against Ukraine since 2014 and its escalation in 2022 have also affected significantly the modern Ukrainian national identity, accelerating the processes of its rethinking and strengthening [1, p. 44–56]. However, the war not only strengthened the Ukrainian identity, but also transformed it – from a cultural and ethnic phenomenon to a civic and value-based one. The basis of the modern Ukrainian national identity is the system of values formed in the conditions of war, and the national identity itself has become one of the determining factors in the survival of the Ukrainian nation.

The consolidation of the nation and the rapid strengthening of the sense of unity took place. National identity has become the basis for an unprecedented level of civic solidarity, from volunteer movements to the participation of businesses and civic organizations in providing for the army. The war eliminated regional, linguistic, confessional and historical divisions, which were used before for political manipulation. Instead of local identities, a national identity has been formed [6], the defining features of which are a civic position and readiness to defend the state [5].

The existential threat to the Ukrainian nation and its state brought new elements to the phenomenon of Ukrainian

national identity. In the conditions of war, its manifestations were volunteerism, the volunteer movement (after a large-scale armed invasion – the formation of territorial defense forces) and the resistance movement in temporarily occupied territories [4, p. 76].

The war also actualized the linguistic, moral-value, cultural and symbolic aspects of identity. The war significantly strengthened the role of the Ukrainian language as a symbol of resistance. The mass ukrainization of everyday life, education, media and cultural space became not only a consequence of state policy, but also a conscious choice of citizens.

The war forced many Ukrainians to rethink deeply their values. The basic elements of the new collective identity were the heroism of the military and volunteers, sacrifice, mutual assistance, honor, service, patriotism.

The war prompted a radical revision of historical narratives. Ukrainian society is actively rethinking the past, moving away from imperial interpretations of history, restoring the memory of Ukrainian heroes, liberation movements, and traditions of state-building. This creates a holistic historical basis for a modern identity based on its own, not externally imposed, values.

The war formed a new system of national symbols – the flag, the coat of arms, the slogan "Glory to Ukraine!", and the figures of fallen heroes. These symbols unite society and become the source of its new collective memory.

The recognition by the community of leading states of Ukraine's war against Russia as a struggle of Ukrainians to preserve their national identity contributed to its establishment not only within the country, but also on the world stage [7, p. 84].

War is an extreme environment in which the viability of a nation and its value foundations are tested. It is in the conditions of war that national identity performs a number of crucially important functions.

Identity unites Ukrainian society around the idea of preserving national statehood and independence. A common

awareness of belonging to the Ukrainian nation ensures the internal unity of society and reduces the risks of its fragmentation.

Identity forms an internal motivation to participate in the defense of the state. A sense of national belonging increases the level of civic responsibility, readiness for resistance, participation in volunteer and defense initiatives. An example is the large-scale self-organization of Ukrainian society after February 24, 2022, which was based not only on the awareness of the level of danger or a sense of civic duty, but primarily on identification with the Ukrainian state and its people.

Having been formed, the national identity provides effective protection of society from propaganda, disinformation and other means of informational and psychological influence of the enemy [2]. It allows citizens of Ukraine to critically perceive information and distinguish true narratives from hostile ones, thereby contributing to the cognitive security of society.

National identity forms the moral and value core of the nation. National identity is based on a system of values, which in wartime play the role of moral guidelines for society. Such values include, in particular, freedom, dignity, the national state and its sovereignty – they became the points of moral and psychological support for Ukrainian society in the war.

The genocidal nature of the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine, aimed at the total destruction of Ukrainian identity in all its manifestations [8, p. 1], has transformed the formation of Ukrainian national identity into a strategic-level task in the field of national security and defense. National identity strengthens the coordination of actions between Ukrainian citizens, civil society institutions, and the state, reduces the vulnerability of Ukrainian society to hybrid hostile influences. Against the backdrop of the upheavals caused by the war, it ensures socio-political stability, the necessary legitimacy of state power, and contributes to the establishment of Ukraine's international image as a mature European nation.

In conditions of existential threat, national identity emerges as the basis of the mental ability of the Ukrainian people not only to survive the war, but also to preserve their own statehood, democracy, and cultural identity.

**Conclusions.** The national identity of Ukrainians has become one of the determining factors in the ability of the state and society to resist effectively Russian armed aggression. Its influence

has been manifested in a high level of social consolidation, readiness for self-sacrifice, resistance to information influences, active self-organization of the population, support for state institutions, and strengthening international solidarity with Ukraine. In fact, national identity has become not only a cultural or social phenomenon, but also a strategic resource of national security, which determines Ukraine's ability to long-term and effective defense.

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