

PERSPECTIVE PIECES

PHILOSOPHY

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OBTAINING IMMUNITY AGAINST SOVIET MINDSET

Abstract. *The purpose of research is focused on constructing theoretical grounds for understanding changes in the mentality of Eastern European countries that are a contribution to strengthening European unity overall. The research methodology is based on sociological polls, bibliographic sources, descriptive and comparative methods which allowed us to view peculiarities of Soviet mentality as a historical form of societal mentality. The scientific novelty includes analysis of the mentality of Eastern European countries and its impact on development of societies in these countries. Descriptive analysis of this article includes defining the logical patterns and trends in development of mentality in Eastern European countries, including Ukraine. This analysis leads to formulation of prospects for cross-border relations between European countries as they successfully interact with each other. Applying social, cultural and economic factors to understanding modern Ukraine, the article demonstrates how the modern mentality operates and which problems occur in it. Conclusions.* *After taking a deep look into special features of the modern Ukrainian mentality, the article concludes that overcoming the Soviet mindset and its leftovers in Eastern Europe's mentality is decisive for the European Union to become a unifying platform for political aspirations of this region.*

Relevance of the topic. Collapse of the Soviet Union didn't come as a surprise to Eastern European countries. What was surprising, it's their ability to adapt to the political and economic dynamism of European realities in the 90s.

It's 2022 now and things are quite different from what they looked like 30 years ago. You may still see a communist star on the monument in downtown Kyiv, but the city doesn't look that much different from Budapest, Prague or Bucharest.

Formulation of the problem. However, Eastern European mentality remains a unique post-Soviet product that includes both – instincts and dreams. Having said this, we have to admit that each country in Europe has its own reasons to sustain types of mentality that they have. In the case of Ukraine, it's uncertainty that makes people behave the way they behave.

Purpose of the article – substantiation of the thesis that the strengthening of Europe in general requires changes in mentality in Eastern Europe.

Presentation of the topic. Under the USSR, Ukrainians did their best to save as much money as they could. Though the Soviet public finance system didn't have any instruments with interest rates for average citizens to have investment returns on their savings, Ukrainians still believed that savings are something worth to do.

Nowadays, Ukrainian banking system is enjoying a steady growth of deposits from private citizens as they still seem to have their old Soviet habit of saving money for the purpose of being sure about tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.

Take the communication skills. Under Soviet rule, Ukrainians didn't discuss politics in the cafes or restaurants, cinemas or poetry clubs. It was much safer just to keep your thoughts unvoiced so no one would report your dissatisfaction with Soviet politics to the KGB. Now Ukraine has quite a high degree of freedom of speech, but people who meet each other in public places still tend to discuss something politically neutral – weather, climate change, consumer prices, cultural trends.

Mikhail Bakhtin, Russian literary critic, had his own theory of what was wrong with private dialogues that Soviet citizens were having. He believed each of them preferred rather to have a monologue since he or she was scared of being criticized to the degree that things were not worth saying if they could attract any criticism (Bakhtin, 1996).

Another Russian communication theorist – Aleksey Losev – also had own version of why Soviet citizens were not capable of discussing important political matters both privately and publicly. Putting the argument about the KGB aside, Losev explained this with psychological traumas received in the 1930s and 1940s when the Soviet state was extremely repressive towards its citizens. Unless you reflect upon your psychological traumas, you can't focus on anything important in your conversations, Losev wrote (Losev, 2001).

In the 2020s it's time to include the inner trends of consumer culture into the analysis of Eastern Europeans' communication skills. Today a resident of Kyiv, Chisinau, Istanbul or Warsaw spends lots of personal time in a shopping mall where he or she may enjoy shopping and entertainment. Therefore, for him or her it's extremely important to discuss own shopping mall experience with his or her peers.

Consumer culture becomes a primary factor of how a person sees the reality around him or her. While politics remains a sphere where private opinions may

easily contradict each other, consumerism gains momentum as an experience that majority of the population believes in. Of course, as GDP growth is not as inclusive as many liberal democrats want it to be, a relatively large share of the population ignores modern consumer culture, but these people are a minority. A minority, whose opinion can't be ignored though their social position becomes secondary in modern societal reality.

Having a proper dialogue isn't an easy thing. One should be updated on the latest news in politics and economy and have own opinion on what's happening in the society. First part is easier than the second. That's where media comes to play a major role.

Demand for media products that help to shape own opinion on things that matter is rising. It's not solely news that drive people's attention motivating them to click on scroll. It's analysis that people are looking for. Less and less people think that modern culture is about visiting classical museums each time you have an opportunity to do so. Instead, they tend to be looking for cultural solutions in the way the society behaves under current political and economic circumstances.

Post-Soviet Mentality and Consumer Culture: Points of Intersection. Under the USSR, it was a common thing to promote your personal interests as much as you could. Such an approach was born as a protest in reaction to the collectivism that the central government was pushing for. Promoting personal interests has been inherited by the modern consumer culture in post-Communist Europe.

Individual ego becomes a major driver for the economy, whether it's Ukraine, Slovakia or Poland. Each citizen pursues his or her own path to own individuality by the means of consuming certain goods and services. Buying something different from what everyone else has becomes as important as having individual passport and individual banking card. Take real estate market. Demand for individual planning of residential property hits new highs all the time as people are ready to pay a premium for the design that they can't see in an apartment that their friends or relatives have. That has a lot to do with social media as consumers, while they're planning purchase of the new house, think of it primarily as of something they'll be posting on their Instagram and Facebook accounts.

Same patterns emerge in the restaurant market. Consumers are willing to pay extra money for food prepared in a highly original way, whether it's burgers or an omelette, craft beer or a cocktail with tomato juice and Finlandia Vodka.

While the Soviet experience stays in the memory as something that may be a reason to have all kinds of excuses for all sorts of guilty pleasures, modern Eastern European consumer culture pushes citizens to do all the shopping they've been dreaming of in one day. That's the logic that stands behind how contemporary shopping malls are organized – with large and long shopping halls that allow you to keep an eye on as many goods as possible.

Oles Gonchar, Ukrainian writer, once mentioned in his diaries: Soviet

Ukrainians as consumers mostly dream of having something that has been imported from the capitalist countries (Gonchar, 2008). This remains true nowadays. Consumers in Eastern European countries consider goods from the West to have a better quality and social popularity. One gains more respect if he or she goes to the local office of Citibank for a commercial loan instead of visiting one of the state-owned banks.

For a post-Communist culture, consuming goods is not solely an economic matter but a factor of personal prestige. That's why approach towards own financial savings is usually defined by how much you get accepted by other people as owner of these savings.

Urban Life and Post-Soviet Mentality. Modern Eastern European cities have a vibrant cultural life, though cultural industry still depends on state subsidies or some kind of support from the central or local government. While in Amsterdam consumers are ready to pay a good price for a ticket to Van Gogh Museum, in Kyiv they largely tend to forgo such type of entertainment and rather visit a restaurant. This is a direct result of a post-Soviet trauma.

While the USSR was heavily promoting museums and cinemas that used to be parts of a systemic propaganda machine, Soviet citizens lost their trust in cultural products. They believe they're pushed to believe in certain cultural values because it is of personal interest of politicians or any other major societal actors.

This is something that needs to be changed. In no way a restaurant may be a substitute to visiting a museum as both are important players on the entertainment market. Media is an important influencer for this problem as it is able to promote types of cultural life that will bring common sense in how consumers view urban life and modern cultural products.

Another important thing is understanding a modern city. It is no longer just a place to live and work, it's something much bigger. A city becomes a universe where one can become a developed personality with all the individual features that he or she is free to obtain. European cities didn't provide as much space for individualism in the 80s.

Take *Shuggie Bain*, a 2020 novel by Douglas Stuart. Agnes, protagonist's mother, is trying to live her own life though she is so much pressured by own alcoholism that it becomes absolutely impossible for her to escape own tragic fate (Stuart, 2020). Novel takes place in Glasgow that very much looks like a city from ancient Greece: mysterious forces control the lives of the residents who can't do anything against the will of these forces.

Kyiv used to be very much like Glasgow. It had its own drug epidemic in the 90s, had its own unemployment and high degree of societal dissatisfaction with politics. But now Ukrainian capital city is much more positive in how it views its own future as well as future of the country. That is why it has become a place that stimulates its residents to have long term plans and look for sustainable solutions

for their living that include healthcare, environmental issues and good financial planning.

Seeking New Identity. It's easy to believe one may change the way people behave and they way they make their own conclusions, however this is rather a difficult business. Politicians who compete for popularity know this very well.

Post-Soviet mentality can be easily tracked by sociologists as it has its own distinctive behavioral patterns. But changing this type of mentality is a huge challenge for the Eastern European countries. Political success of populists in Poland and Hungary is a good example of how hard is to change people's general worldview.

A lot depends on how society thinks of itself and how it sees own ego. A struggle between "we" and "I" matters both for politics and economy. Search for individual identity is absolutely necessary and even unavoidable, but should lead to sustainable democratic solutions and not to authoritarianism that is now seen in Russia and Belarus.

But what politicians can't or don't want to pursue, cultural industry may do by itself. Demonstrating basic patterns of post-Soviet mentality in media and all kinds of creative products will help Eastern Europeans obtain an immunity against the Soviet mindset. This is extremely important as Europe is seeking for its own new identity.

Conclusion. The European Union is a rather successful project that can bring the changes that Eastern European countries need. But reforming own political and cultural mentality is a mandatory prerequisite for having a full participation in the European political project. Mentality in Eastern European countries needs changes in order to become a driving force for strengthening Europe.

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