Patterns and Dynamics of National and European Identities in Central and Eastern Europe

The paper is analyzing the structure, dynamics and interplay of national and European identities within the geographical space of the former Communist Europe and the Western part of the former Soviet Union. European identity, most broadly defined as one’s cultural and political self-identification with the European Union, is the forming-factor for the European community and pre-condition for the further development of the European project. For the European Union being founded on a community of values as listed in the treaties, alongside with the EU institutions being the “backbone” of the project, European identity performs the function of its cohesive “glue”.

The world economic crisis of 2008, the migration crisis of 2015, Brexit, the rise of far-right political forces promoting populist and nationalist agendas challenged the European identity, re-opening the discourse of the crisis of European identity and erosion of European core values. These and other developments have particularly affected the feeling of belonging to the European community in Central and Eastern European societies where European identity is also challenged by the ongoing processes of national self-determination and formation of the national identity initialized after the collapse of the Soviet Union and associated with the so called feeling of “existential fear” for the own national and political community.

The paper is analyzing the cross-country differences and similarities in national self-identification and the feeling of belonging to Europe, and their changes over time in selected Central and Eastern European states. The paper examines which sets of social, political and economic values are associated with the low and high levels of European identity and how the interplay of European and national identities occurs. Paper employs method of principal components and multilevel modelling. The database of the paper is the World Values Survey and European Values Survey for the period of 1990-2019.

Keywords: national identity, European identity, European values, Central and Eastern Europe