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**CURRENT CONFLICT OF IDENTITIES
ON THE UKRAINIAN-RUSSIAN BORDERLAND**

(peer-review on the collective monograph: Vermenych Ya. V. The Ukrainian-Russian Borderland in the Space of Identities Conflict in History and Modernity / Editor in-Chief V.A. Smolii. Kyiv: Institute of History of Ukraine, NAS of Ukraine, 2024. 331 p.)

**НОВІТНІЙ КОНФЛІКТ ІДЕНТИЧНОСТЕЙ
НА УКРАЇНСЬКО-РОСІЙСЬКОМУ ПОГРАНИЧЧІ**

(рецензія на колективну монографію: Верменич Я.В. Українсько-російське пограниччя у просторі конфлікту ідентичностей в історії та сучасності / відповідальний редактор В.А. Смолій. Київ : Інститут історії України НАН України, 2024. 331 с.)

Current situation in Ukraine and the world in general, in particular the Russo-Ukrainian War, which became a key factor in changes in the international security system, once again makes us reconsider its origins, causes, and possible consequences. In times of war, the theoretical issues of the essence of war and peace acquire a practical dimension and are the focus of numerous modern Ukrainian and foreign scholars.

In 2024 Yaroslava Vermenych, Ukrainian historian, Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor, Corresponding Member of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine published the monograph “The Ukrainian-Russian Borderland in the Space of Identity Conflict in History and Modernity”. The monograph is devoted to the issue of civilizational identification of Ukraine, the military realities of today, and the factors of emergence of controversial models of historical memory on the Ukrainian-Russian border. The monograph is a significant scientific addition to the study of Eastern Europe intricate identity formation processes, in particular in the territory that has become the site of stark political and cultural contradictions between Ukraine and Russia.

The content of the peer-reviewed monograph is considered to be one of the characteristic features. It should be noted that the monograph is well structured and consists of Introduction, four Chapters, Afterword and Appendices, each of which is aimed at revealing diverse aspects of the identity conflict on the Ukrainian-Russian border. The author made an attempt to trace the dynamics of identities in these territories historically, analyzing not only the political context, but also socio-cultural, linguistic and religious aspects. A chief focus was on the processes of ethnic identification, as well as the issues on the territorial belonging and civic identity under the conditions of modern political crisis.

Due to a comprehensive approach, the monograph highlighted not only global trends, but also discussed issues related to language policy, culture of memory, as well as the influence of historical myths on the formation of civic identity formation in Ukraine and Russia. It should be highlighted how thoroughly intricate mechanisms of identity adaptation to shifts in the external political environment have been studied. It is particularly important when considering war and relationship between the two nations.

Yaroslava Vermenych analyzed a wide historiographical spectrum thoroughly, considered diverse approaches and concepts to the issue of identity in the Ukrainian-Russian borderland, taking into account both historical and contemporary aspects of the above-mentioned issue. The author elucidates the influence of the socio-political changes, cultural factors, and geopolitical context on the identities formation in the region.

The research is an important contribution to understanding the processes taking place in these territories and helps outline the prospects for further development of the region in terms of creation of the “enemy” image and collective consciousness.

A chief focus is on the current state of the Ukrainian-Russian relations, which are viewed, in particular through the prism of the war, the conflict in Donbas, as well as the annexation of the Crimea. There is an in-depth analysis of how these events affect the reception of identities in different social groups and a general narrative of the national unity and territorial integrity in the monograph.

Hence, in Chapter 1 “Conflict Space in Coordinates of Border Philosophy” there is under study a crucial issue, which modern Ukraine is facing – the identity conflict issue on the Ukrainian-Russian borderland, which not only has historical roots, but also has a relevant significance in the context of modern political and social processes. The author focuses on the concept of “border philosophy”, which is an interpretation of the borders and boundaries not only geographical, but also cultural, historical and social intersections. The Ukrainian-Russian borderland becomes a place where historical narratives and cultural identities not only coexist, but also come into conflict, which leads to geopolitical and social tensions. The current state of the “hybrid identity” on this borderland is the result of long-term processes of assimilation, integration and conflict between the Ukrainian and the Russian identities (p. 35).

The historian made an attempt to show how borders become arenas of ideological and cultural clashes, as well as a place where transformations of the national identities occur owing to the concept of the “border philosophy”. Due to the above-mentioned, the Ukrainian-Russian borderland could be considered as a space in which there is constant interaction between diverse cultural, linguistic, and historical traditions, taking on a contradicting character.

Yaroslava Vermenych brought together concepts from history, philosophy and cultural studies in order to provide a deeper understanding on the issues of the conflict on the borders between Ukraine and Russia. Understanding the specifics of the conflict requires the application of the concept of “border philosophy”, which offers a new perspective on space as a site of intersections – not just geographically, but also culturally and identity-wise – and aids in comprehending the intricate dynamics that occur on the boundary between two powerful cultures and nations.

Chapter 2, which is called: “Formation of Trajectories of Identity Development,” deals with the complex processes of interaction of the national identities at the intersection of the Ukrainian and Russian history, culture, and politics. There is the analysis of the stages of identity development on the Ukrainian-Russian borderland in the chapter, where the space of conflict between cultural, linguistic, and political aspects has become a key factor. The author emphasized the importance of historical narratives emerged in both countries in the context of the imperial and post-imperial processes, which brought about contradictions in the national identities formation. “In the historical dimension, the border acts not only as geographical, geopolitical, or administrative, but also as a psychological boundary” (p. 89).

The emphasis on the variability of identities in time and space is considered to be one of the crucial aspects of the section. The author highlighted that the identity issue became central under the conditions of the conflict in eastern Ukraine and was of utmost importance not only at the level of political and social processes, but also in the context of cultural and interpersonal relations. The Cossack era became a defining stage in the process of forming the Ukrainian national identity and statehood. It was the Cossacks, as a socio-political and military phenomenon, that laid the foundations of an autonomous state formation and contributed to the consolidation of the Ukrainian society around the idea of self-government and national independence. The Cossacks influence could be traced in modern national symbols, political ideas and military traditions of Ukraine (p. 111). It should be noted that the scholar drew attention to the polarization of identities in the modern context. The scholar highlighted how cultural and linguistic barriers between Ukraine and Russia became an obstacle to the development of mutual understanding, which leads to the aggravation of conflicts.

Hence, the section is an essential study due to which it is feasible to understand the complex nature of the conflict on the border of identities, determined by both historical factors and contemporary political conditions.

Chapter 3, entitled “Constructing Religious Identity”, draws attention to how religious ideas and practices influence the formation of political, social, and cultural borders between Ukraine and Russia, which is particularly relevant in the light of recent events and conflicts.

In the context of the Ukrainian-Russian borderland, religion plays a role in the national identities formation, often acting as a barrier or, conversely, as a means of forming common features between different ethnic groups.

One of the key points is the following issue: how religious identity could affect the socio-cultural integration or disintegration in eastern Ukraine, in the Crimea, as well as in border regions where there is active religious competition? The above-mentioned issue raises important questions for the author about the role of religion in maintaining social stability and peaceful coexistence of different cultures and religions.

The chapter is extremely relevant in the context of current political and religious conflicts, particularly in eastern Ukraine and the Crimea, and stresses out the importance of religion as a

factor influencing interethnic and interreligious relations. Hence, the section is vital regarding the study on the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, since religion is indeed not only a personal but also a political factor in the creation of national and cultural identities. The author showed how religious affiliation could become an important tool for both strengthening and dividing society in the context of modern conflict.

The last chapter, “Local Communities of the Borderland: Challenges of Modernity,” covers how the long-standing conflict between Ukraine and Russia affects the formation and transformation of the local communities identity, and modern rethinking of the concept of the local in the context of globalization. Special emphasis is on the change in the self-identification of the population, its attitude towards state institutions and political narratives. “The problems that modern Ukraine faces in the formation and consolidation of the cultural and civilizational identity are largely caused by its geopolitical position... The regional local factor under such conditions becomes a factor that has a decisive influence on the “spatial” dimension of constructing the national history” (p. 273).

The objective conclusions (Afterword, pp. 309–320) that meet the objectives set in the research are impressive and reflect the scientific novelty of the monograph. The author Yaroslava Vermynych analyzed the genesis of territorial and identity confrontations on the Ukrainian-Russian borderland and examined the determinants of conflict in border societies associated with the social and mental deformations in Afterword. The analysis of the cultural and mental borders formation was carried out through the prism of the Ukrainian intellectual practices of constructing models of the regional identity, which had a powerful national impulse in the all-Russian historical discourse. The creation and implementation of the system of information and cultural security is considered as a possible resource for solving the issue on the identity conflict constructively, eliminating conflicts in Ukrainian society and reintegrating the residents of occupied territories.

The monograph is an independent, relevant, innovative study in its concept, which meets all modern requirements of the historical science. The presented historical, ethnographic, ethnic and administrative maps of Ukraine are considered to be a significant addition to the peer-reviewed monograph. The above-mentioned illustrates the processes of formation, transformation and interaction of identities on the Ukrainian-Russian border comprehensively, reflects the dynamics of the population ethnic composition in different periods of history, demonstrates cultural and ethnographic differences between all regions of Ukraine, and highlights regional features of the Ukrainian and Russian identity development.

It should be noted that a terminological dictionary would not be superfluous in such a scientific publication. The recommendation to add a terminological dictionary indicates a fervent desire to make the publication more accessible and understandable for readers, who may not be familiar with the terms related to this topic.

Hence, the monograph “The Ukrainian-Russian Borderland in the Space of Identity Conflict in History and Modernity” is an important and valuable contribution to the study of complex issues on the national identity, culture and history in the context of the modern Ukrainian-Russian conflict. It will be useful both for scholars and a wide range of readers interested in the issues of identity, nationalism and interstate relations, who are not indifferent to the history of their native land.

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