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THE LEGAL IDENTITY OF ODESA'S CITIZENS

The article analyzes the evolution of the legal identity of Odesa's citizens of through the lens of historical, cultural, and social aspects, focusing on the city's unique legal system formed by its multinational heritage. Starting with Odesa's early 19th-century reputation as a cosmopolitan center known for its cultural diversity and special legal status as a “free port”, it examines how these factors influenced the city's legal-cultural landscape.

The article highlights the duality of internal and external aspects of Odesa's legal identity as a whole. Internally, the cultural and legal image fosters social cohesion, collective legal consciousness, and legal identification among the city's residents. Externally, Odesa plays a significant role in developing national identity, international relations, and European integration.

The initiatives and programs of the Odesa City Council that support its national legal identity are studied and interpreted from a legal perspective. These include various legal measures aimed at supporting intercultural dialogue and tolerance, illustrated by municipal policies.

The importance of Odesa's integration into the European legal space is emphasized. Odesa actively strives to align with European standards and values by joining various European associations. These steps strengthen the city's international ties and stimulate the evolution of the legal identity of Odesa's residents, increasingly oriented towards European legal and cultural values.

It is concluded that the evolution of the legal identity of Odesa's citizens is a complex and multifaceted process involving historical, cultural, and social factors, as well as active legal initiatives by local authorities. This process contributes not only to the strengthening of national legal identity but also to the European integration.

Key words: *law, modern state, legal system, legal interpretation, legal consciousness, legal culture, legal space, legal identity, national legal identity.*

Мельничук О. С. Правова ідентичність городян міста Одеси

У статті проаналізовано питання щодо еволюції правової ідентичності городян міста Одеси через призму історичних, культурних та соціальних аспектів, зосереджуючись на унікальній правовій системі міста, сформованій його багатонаціональною спадщиною. Починаючи з репутації Одеси на початку XIX століття як космополітичного центру, відомого своєю культурною різноманітністю та особливим юридичним статусом «вільного порту», аналізується, як ці фактори вплинули на правовокультурний ландшафт міста.

Зроблено акцент на двоїстості внутрішніх і зовнішніх аспектів правової ідентичності міста Одеси в цілому. Внутрішньо – культурний та правовий образ



сприяє соціальній згуртованості, колективній правовій свідомості та правовій ідентифікації серед мешканців міста. Зовнішньо – Одеса відіграє важливу роль у розвитку національної ідентичності, міжнародних відносин та європейської інтеграції.

Вивчені та інтерпретовані з правової точки зору ініціативи та програми Одеської міської ради, що підтримують національну правову ідентичність. До них входять різноманітні правові заходи, спрямовані на підтримку міжкультурного діалогу та толерантності, які ілюструються міськими політиками.

Підкреслена важливість інтеграції Одеси до європейського правового простору. Одеса активно прагне до відповідності європейським стандартам та цінностям, вступаючи до різних європейських асоціацій. Такі кроки зміцнюють міжнародні зв'язки міста і стимулюють еволюцію правової ідентичності одеситів, яка все більше орієнтується на європейські правові та культурні цінності.

Доведено, що еволюція правової ідентичності городян міста Одеси є складним і багатограним процесом, що включає історичні, культурні та соціальні фактори тощо, а також активні правові ініціативи місцевих органів влади. Цей процес сприяє не тільки укріпленню національної правової ідентичності, але й європейській інтеграції.

Ключові слова: право, сучасна держава, правова система, правова інтерпретація, правова свідомість, правова культура, правовий простір, правова ідентичність, національна правова ідентичність.

Introduction. The legal-cultural representation of the city of Odesa in the Ukrainian communicative space is closely linked to the dominance of the so-called “Odesa myth”, which manifests in several layers. Researchers of this myth believe that its roots lie in the historical aspects of the city’s legal image formation. As early as the beginning of the 19th century, Odesa had gained a reputation as a multinational, tolerant, cultural, and “free” city. Scholars and artists often referred to Odesa as the Pearl of the Black Sea, Southern Palmyra, Southern Capital of Ukraine, Pearl by the Sea, Little Paris, Little Venice, Queen of the Black Sea, and the capital of humor [1, p. 27–32]. These epithets underscore the multifaceted nature of the Odesa myth, reflecting the city’s cultural, historical, and social richness.

In exploration of Odesa’s identity from a cultural studies perspective, G.O. Nikolaeva notes that “Odesa” is a different “country”. The formation of old Odesa’s identity was influenced by several key factors: the traditions of Levantine trade conducted by Greek, Armenian, and Jewish diasporas; the noble culture with its specific tastes and lifestyle; and Ukrainian folk culture. The urban elites contributed to transforming Odesa into a “porto-franco” [2, p. 230], further emphasizing its unique legal status and fostering the development of trade relations. This unique legal regime played a significant role in shaping the city’s legal and cultural landscape, laying the groundwork for its continued development as a multinational and culturally rich center.

The evolution of the legal identity of Odesa’s citizens and, consequently, the “Odesa myth” in the first half of the 20th century led to new interpretations of Odesa in terms of its legal culture formation. In this context, as noted by I.D. Chernykh and G.M. Stoyanova, the contemporary virtual representation of Odesa is also formed. The Odesa myth continues to play a key role as a marker of cultural identity, maintaining its ability to sustain this cultural marker. In the virtual space, the city exists not only as a geographic locus but as a dynamic process, a system of interactions among residents who identify with a particular urban community. This creates a new dimension where not only territorial but also temporal, linguistic, and cultural barriers disappear [3, p. 17].

The issue of the urban identity of Odesa is gaining both internal and external dimensions. Within the community, imagery serves as a means of integrating the population, uniting residents into a cohesive community fostered by a sense of belonging to their city. Externally, this image functions as the city’s brand, playing a crucial role in the competitive struggle to attract migration, financial, and information flows necessary for the metropolis’s development. From an internal



perspective, Odesa's urban identity serves as a tool for social cooperation and cohesion, fostering a strong sense of community and collective self-awareness. This enhances social cohesion and supports stability, which is an important aspect of legal and social order [3].

This approach to understanding Odesa allows for the consideration of its unique legal aspects, shaped by the city's multicultural and diverse history. Odesa's legal culture reflects the complex processes of interaction between different ethnic, social, and legal traditions that have formed it into a unique center of cultural and legal life.

Problem Statement. The article aims to explore the evolution of the legal identity of Odesa's citizens by analyzing historical, cultural, and social factors that have influenced the legal consciousness and identity of the city's population. Special attention is given to the role of the Odesa myth and cultural heritage in shaping the city's legal image. The research includes an analysis of legal programs and local government initiatives that support the development and maintenance of Odesa's national legal identity and its citizens, particularly their legal interpretation.

Research Results. Odesa, a city with a rich history and cultural diversity, plays an important role in Ukraine's legal space, relying on its unique legal and cultural traditions. A key feature of Odesa's legal culture and a significant element of its national legal identity is its multi-nationalism. Most of Odesa's citizens are ethnic Ukrainians, but the city is also known for its unique multi-ethnic composition. The vast cultural diversity, encompassing Jews, Moldovans, Germans, Bulgarians, Armenians, Romanians, and others, gives the city a special legal context and influences its positioning within Ukraine's legal system [4, p. 345].

This multi-ethnicity is regularly reflected in the legal acts adopted by the Odesa City Council, taking into account the needs and characteristics of different population groups. The multi-nationalism of Odesa is one of the key aspects of its legal identity, determining its role in the country's legal space.

An interpretation of these legal acts clearly emphasizes that Odesa actively supports intercultural dialogue and peaceful coexistence among representatives of different nationalities. For example, the decisions of the Odesa City Council "On measures to counteract manifestations of fascism, Nazism, and ultra-nationalism in Odesa" from July 7, 2009, No. 4434-V and "On measures to prevent manifestations of Nazism, fascism, and radical nationalism in Odesa" from February 19, 2013, No. 2824-VI are vivid examples. These legal documents clearly illustrate the importance of maintaining mutual understanding and rejecting extremism in the context of Odesa's multinational character, creating a unique legal context for the city.

A clear example of the transformation of Odesa's legal identity is the program acts that emphasize the importance of intercultural understanding and support for diversity. The Odesa City Council, in its City Program for Supporting the Activities of National-Cultural Societies of Odesa in 2010, approved by decision No. 5942-V on July 13, 2010, clearly defined the priority tasks for implementing ethno-national policy in the city. The program aimed to create favorable conditions for the development of national minorities, ensure their rights and freedoms, and support the active participation of national-cultural societies in the public life of Odesa [5].

Furthermore, the program outlined measures to strengthen inter-ethnic harmony and promote mutual understanding among the various ethnic groups in the city. In particular, it emphasized the importance of developing cultural pluralism and openness to multilingual and intercultural interactions. The program aimed to create conditions for supporting the interests and rights of each national minority residing in Odesa and ensuring their equal access to the city's cultural and social resources.

Interestingly, in 2016, a new city target program was adopted with a new focus, still in line with the affirmation of Odesa's local identity. The program was titled "City Target Program of National-Patriotic Education of Children and Youth of Odesa 'I am an Odesa's citizen' for 2016–2020" [6]. However, according to the decision of the Odesa City Council dated October 4, 2017, No. 2444-VII, the program's name was changed to "I am an Odesa's citizen, a Patriot of Ukraine". This change underscores the evolution of the legal identity of Odesa's citizens, showing that the emphasis is not only on local identity but also on nurturing patriots of Ukraine, thus affirming the national legal identity of Odesa.



This program, extended for 2021–2026 and approved by the decision of the Odesa City Council on February 3, 2021, No. 55-VIII [7], demonstrates the evolution of approaches to educating the younger generation. Specifically, the title of the program “I am an Odesa’s citizen, a Patriot of Ukraine” reflects the desire to combine local belonging with national patriotism, thus creating an integrated model of legal identity. This is important not only in terms of legal education but also in the context of creating a strong civil society capable of active participation in the country’s legal and political system.

It should also be noted that such a program entails a comprehensive approach to education, including educational, cultural, and social aspects, which contribute to the all-around development of youth. It aims to instill in children and young people a deep understanding of their rights and responsibilities, respect for legal norms and values, as well as the development of legal awareness and culture. This, in turn, contributes not only to personal development but also to the strengthening of legal order and stability in society.

Moreover, the shift in focus from local to national legal identity indicates a dynamic process of integrating Ukraine’s regions into a unified legal space, which is an important step towards consolidating Ukrainian society [8, pp. 53-54]. This approach helps create a harmonious combination of local traditions and national values, making the legal system more flexible and adaptable in the current conditions of armed conflict.

National legal identity is a concept that has not yet received sufficient attention from legal researchers. More often, scientific studies focus on the concepts of political identity [9, p. 189], national identity [10, p. 106], or understanding identity in the fields of psychology, philosophy, etc. However, if the concept of legal identity is tied to a specific legal, state, or urban space, it is quite logical to talk about the existence of a so-called local legal identity, which will have spatial boundaries of a particular city, state (national legal identity), or even a union of states (integrative legal identity) and will relate to the corresponding legal system—urban legal system, national legal system, the legal system of the European Union, etc.

In 2005, the Odesa City Council decided to create the Department of European Integration and Relations with the Odesa Diaspora (decision dated July 15, 2005, No. 4229-IV). This department aimed to support and strengthen ties with representatives of the Odesa diaspora living in the countries of the European Union and other states. The department’s provisions emphasized the importance of preserving the cultural and legal identity of Odesa’s citizens living abroad, as well as facilitating their integration into the European legal space.

This step was significant for the development of legal consciousness and understanding among Odesa’s citizens and for promoting the idea of European integration among the city’s residents. Additionally, the functioning of this department contributed to a deeper understanding of the legal aspects of intercultural dialogue, which is crucial for a multinational city like Odesa. The legal interpretation of this approach shows how the city authorities use legal mechanisms to support and develop national identity, particularly through integration into the European legal space and strengthening ties with the diaspora. Today, the aforementioned department has been dissolved [11]. Instead, there is the “Odesa Association of Nationalities” Council under the Odesa City Mayor [12] and the Department of Culture, International Cooperation, and European Integration of the Odesa City Council, the regulations of which were approved by the decision of the Odesa City Council on September 28, 2022, No. 978-VIII [13].

The European orientation of Odesa and its residents is an important aspect of the city’s legal identity, influencing the development of its legal system. The local self-government bodies of Odesa have repeatedly emphasized the significance of the city for the establishment of European culture and the development of a European lifestyle in Ukraine. At the same time, Odesa actively integrates into contemporary European associations.

These aspirations formed the basis for Odesa’s entry into the international association “European Cities Marketing.” The main ideas of this organization are an effective marketing policy for tourist products. For Odesa, this means entering the external market, strengthening the positive image of the city in Europe, and spreading successfully implemented projects on the



international stage. Participation in this organization enhances the city's prestige and acknowledges its importance on the world's tourist map [14]. From a legal standpoint, Odesa's integration into European associations promotes the harmonization of local legislation with European standards, which, in turn, influences the legal consciousness and identity of Odesa's citizens.

Another step towards European integration was that at a meeting of the executive committee of the "Eurocities Association," Odesa's candidacy was presented for membership as an associate member of this organization, and at the general assembly of this Association, Odesa officially received an invitation to participate in its work. According to the decision of the Odesa City Council [15], Odesa became a member of this Association.

According to the "Eurocities Association" Charter, its main tasks are to improve the quality of life and influence European policy to protect the interests of large cities. The Association also promotes the transfer and exchange of experience between the governments of European cities. The Association's activities cover various areas such as economic development, urban planning, ecology, transport, culture, and social welfare [16]. And with the start of the "war on February 24, 2022, city leaders are playing a crucial role in Europe's response to Russian aggression... ideas for the reconstruction of Ukrainian cities are being discussed" [17]. For Odesa, participation in the "Eurocities Association" is an important step towards integrating into the European space. This decision reflects the city's aspirations for development and improving living conditions for its residents by leveraging advanced European experience and receiving appropriate assistance from European cities.

Conclusions. Thus, the legal identity of the citizens of Odesa, considered in the context of general theoretical analysis, demonstrates steps towards strengthening the national legal identity and Odesa's belonging to the European community.

Odesa, known for its multi-nationality and cultural heritage, is gradually adapting its legal and social institutions to the challenges of modernity while preserving its unique local identity. Undoubtedly, the "Odesa myth" has had and continues to have a special significance in shaping the legal consciousness of Odesa's citizens, creating a unique legal image of the city. Legal programs and initiatives of local authorities play an important role in this process, aiming to support and develop the national legal identity of Odesa's citizens.

Within the framework of this article, special attention is paid to the analysis and legal interpretation of legal programs. Such programs reflect Odesa's desire for the harmonious coexistence of different cultural communities and the support of their legal identity within the national legal system.

Another important aspect is Odesa's integration into European associations, emphasizing the city's aspiration to comply with European standards and values. These steps contribute not only to strengthening international ties but also to the evolution of the legal identity of the citizens, which increasingly aligns with European legal and cultural values.

Therefore, the evolution of the legal identity of the citizens of Odesa is a complex and multifaceted process that includes historical, cultural, and social factors, as well as active legal initiatives by local authorities. This process contributes not only to the preservation of Ukrainian national legal identity but also to the integration of Odesa into the European legal space.

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