DOI 10.52468/2542-1514.2026.10(1).5-14

FEATURES OF THE LEGAL SYSTEMS CLASSIFICATION IN EASTERN EUROPE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE AXIOLOGICAL APPROACH AND THE LEGAL SYSTEMS LEGITIMACY

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Article info

Received –
2025 January 20
Accepted –
2026 January 10
Available online –
2026 March 20

Keywords

Eastern Europe, westernization, comparative jurisprudence, legal system, legal family, legitimation of law, axiology of law

The subject of the research is the methodological problem of identification of some world regions as a legal systems and legal families. In recent years, in practical comparative legal studies (calculation of indices of the rule of law, human rights and freedom of the press), as well as in theoretical comparative legal literature, there has been a problem of incorrect universalization of legal system identification criteria based on the Western legal tradition alone. This problem is also particularly clearly manifested in the uncertainty of European legal space regions in the context of their attribution to a separate legal family. A striking example of such an uncertain region is Eastern Europe.

The purpose of the research is to substantiate the directions for improving legal comparative legal research in the context of postclassical methodology, namely the approach from the point of view of legal values and in the aspect of legitimacy of legal institutions in the investigated legal system.

Methodology. The interdisciplinary approach serves as the methodological basis of this research. It provides a synthesis of methodological tools of classical jurisprudence and methodological techniques and achievements of related socio-humanitarian fields of knowledge and post-classical jurisprudence. In our research we use sociological studies, especially legal sociology, political science and legal axiology, which allows a comprehensive study of the legal systems and legal families on a real case of investigated countries.

Results and conclusions. The authors revised the existing criteria for classifying legal families, considered the criteria for the separation of legal families, as well as the classifications of legal families themselves, proposed by R. Leger, K. Zweigert and H. Ketz, V.A. Lafitsky. From the standpoint of non-classical science, authors propose a mechanism for verifying the legal system from the legal axiology point of view. This axiological approach can be applicated through an assessment of the legitimacy of norms, according to its value basis. In a dependence of affiliation of these values as a western or eastern (liberal or conservative etc.) it is correct to conclude that one legal system belongs to a particular legal family.

The main results. The authors conclude that the prospects for the development of contemporary comparative law also lie in strengthening an interdisciplinary approach that allows combining the achievements of jurisprudence with sociology, philosophy, economics and cultural studies. The conducted integrative study of legal traditions opens up new possibilities for the analysis of legal systems. For example, it allows us to solve a specific research problem on the relevance of the legal systems of Eastern Europe to the Slavic legal family. The prerequisites for substantiating this conclusion were a shift in focus from the analysis of a not entirely universal criteria of legal ideology to the more basic criterion of legal axiology. It also allowed us to offer tools that opened up opportunities for a more differentiated definition of values relevant to the corresponding legal system through an analysis of the legitimacy of institutions and norms.

ISSN 2542-1514 (Print)

1. Introduction.

Comparative jurisprudence presupposes a certain axiom, which consists in the idea of the universal structure of the legal system, or rather, the universal values of all national legal systems. In this regard, the appeal to legal values as a separate subject of research is actualized, which makes it possible to discover some implicit features of the legal system and legal norms [1, pp. 9-10]. Consideration of values in law as a separate subject of research is characteristic of the axiology of law, which is developed in the literature both as an independent field [2] and as a separate field of research in legal technology, for example, in terms of axiological conflicts of normative acts [3, p. 106].

Comparative jurisprudence faces the problem of uncritically accepted universalism in the context of defining the specifics of individual legal families. In particular, the legal space of Eastern Europe is still an unpopular topic for comparative studies. There is no consensus regarding the classification of Eastern European countries into a particular legal family, as well as the definition of their specifics. Moreover, due to the spread of the concept of "mixed" or "hybrid" legal systems, it is difficult to approach the definition of the specifics of such a legal space [4, pp. 96-97; 5, pp. 51-52], which, of course, requires the development of new explanatory and research models.

2. Methodological problems of classification of legal systems of Eastern Europe in the fundamental literature on comparative jurisprudence

The assumption of the universality of legal systems described above is manifested in different provisions of comparative studies and is found in different authors. For example, a provision that is generally conventionally accepted among comparativists is the requirement of comparability of legal systems [6, p. 90; 7, P. 13; 8, P. 51]. This premise implies that virtually any legal system becomes comparable, which is not always confirmed in research practice. For example, in the two-volume K. Zweigert and H. The Ketz point to the existence of "other legal families" that do not fall into the general classification, to which they include the Far Eastern legal family, Islamic law and Hindu law [8, p. 428].

In addition, comparative studies are based on some assumed universal criteria for comparing orders. R. Leger calls such criteria "technical", since they relate to legal technology [9, p. 104]. However, if we also turn to the practice of specific comparative legal studies, we can find other criteria that are only recognized as universal for all existing States, but are not. For example, human rights as one of such criteria. Human rights are a fairly new legal category in the historical review and are more relevant in their origin to the Western legal tradition. Examples of such studies comparing states depending on the values of the Western legal tradition include the authoritative rule of law rating[1], the Human Freedom Index[2].

As Saidov A.Kh. notes, one of the main problems faced by comparative lawyers is Eurocentrism in approaches to the study of legal traditions. Most of the methodologies used in comparative law were developed on the basis of Western legal experience, which often leads to underestimation or distortion of the importance of non-Western legal traditions [10, p. 15]. For such a situation, A.N. Medushevsky suggests using the concept of "fake universalism" [11, p. 9]. The quoted Saidov A.H., describing this problem, appeals to the established research direction of the "third world" countries or TWAIL (Third World approaches to International Law) [12, pp. 110-111; 13, pp. 39-40].

Anyway, in the context of comparative legal research itself, some of the lawyers we cite assert the existence of a "single" law with "common historical roots, common values and common instruments for regulating relations between people" [6, p. 96]. In addition to historical arguments, the cited work also provides an argument for the common purpose of various legal systems. This goal, according to V.A.

[1] WJP Rule of Law Index. World Justice Project website. URL: https://worldjusticeproject.org/rule-of-law-index/global (accessed: 09.12.2024).

[2] Human Freedom Index. CATO Institute website. URL: https://www.cato.org/search/category/human-freedom-index (accessed: 09.12.2024).

Lafitsky, is the common good [6, p. 98].

We can see a qualitatively different position in the context of the universality of legal systems in the works of another classic of comparative studies, R. Leger. He singled out English, French and German law as the "main" legal systems [9, pp. 7-9]. He calls into question the very possibility of a universal distribution of legal systems by families or groups [9, pp. 99-100]. Special attention should be paid to the legal systems of states highlighted by him, which, as R. Leger points out, are not legal states and do not have a legal tradition [9, P. 234].

Leger notes that it is correct to single out ideological and historical criteria as criteria for dividing legal systems. The ideological criterion makes it possible to distinguish legal families depending on the general concept of law, the relationship between law and the state, the state and the individual. Based on the historical criterion, he proposes to distinguish between legal systems with a long history, where law is a value, so they can be designated as "legal states", and legal systems of states lacking a consolidated legal tradition or states in which the value of law has not become predominant over the value of ideology or religion [9, p. 104].

A similar differentiated approach to legal families is proposed by K. Zweigert and H. Ketz. It is based on an analysis of the stylistic characteristics of legal families. The stylistic characteristics of legal families is proposed to be distinguished by historical, doctrinal, ideological, institutional criteria, as well as by the criteria of sources of law and their interpretation [8, p. 109], which was designated by R. Leger's technical and legal criterion. In their work, the authors identify 8 legal families: Roman, Germanic, Scandinavian, common law, socialist law, law of the Far East, Islamic law, Hindu law [8, p. 118].

None of the presented author's approaches allows us to unambiguously attribute the countries of Eastern Europe to a specific legal family. R. Leger's classification only opens up the prospect for studying their identity, but does not allow them to be unambiguously attributed to any legal family. Although he points out that some states of Northern, Central and Southern Europe belong to "states governed by the rule of law" [9, p. 106], he clearly does not place them under any of the legal families and does not draw conclusions concerning the legal systems of Eastern European countries [9, P. 186]. It is even more obvious that the classification of Zweigert and H. Ketz are not suitable for identifying the legal systems of Eastern Europe, since they do not contain any indication of "original" legal families with a specific stylistic characteristics of legal families. Therefore, in order to achieve certainty about the place of the countries of Eastern Europe, let us turn to the specifics of such legal systems.

3. Features of the legal systems of Eastern Europe as a separate subject of comparative legal research

The countries of Eastern Europe usually include the states of Central and Northeastern Europe, inhabited mainly by Slavs. Although, of course, it is possible to name certain countries of Eastern Europe in which the Slavic population is not predominant (for example, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia). The existing approaches make it possible to define the countries of Eastern Europe as countries with a socialist past, in which there was a transition to a market economy and a liberal tradition of constitutionalism [14, p. 7]. In the all-Russian classifier of the countries of the world, the countries of Eastern Europe include: Bulgaria, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, as well as the CIS countries – Belarus, Ukraine and Russia. This classification is very arbitrary, and there can be no question of a closed list of Eastern European countries.

The identification of Eastern European countries and the Eastern European legal tradition in the legal and political sciences gained popularity in the middle of the twentieth century in the context of the political confrontation between the West and the Soviet bloc [15, pp. 45-46]. However, the term "Eastern Europe" originated in the Age of Enlightenment, as a territory different from Western Europe in that it was more or less influenced by the East: Byzantium, the Ottoman Empire, and in the twentieth century – communism, which came from the USSR [16, p. 4]. A characteristic feature of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire there was a lesser degree of romanization. Therefore, the East was more developed

ISSN 2542-1514 (Print)

legally during the late Roman period, unlike the western part of the Empire, which was invaded by Germanic tribes [17, pp. 204-205].

In the future, Christianity began to have a significant influence on the formation of the legal space of Eastern European countries. Christianity regulated many social relations in Eastern Europe that were not subject to secular law. Christianity has also led to the formation of new legal acts related to Christian dogmas.

In addition to the influence of religion on the Eastern European legal space, German law had a great influence on it, which manifested itself in the codification of legislation in Modern times. In addition, there is currently no precedent in the legal space of Eastern Europe as a source of law, which is also due to the historical development of the region [18, pp. 38-39].

Speaking about the specifics of the political systems of Eastern Europe, political scientists argue that the states of Eastern Europe from the last century to the present day have gone through the stages of nation–states, fascization and Sovietization, and later Westernization and democratization. Political scientists also agree that since the 1980s, the countries of Eastern Europe have gone through 3 successive stages of democratic transit: liberalization, democratization and consolidation [19, p. 18-19; 20, p. 9-10]. During these years, new constitutions were adopted and basic laws were formulated (the Constitution of Bulgaria in 1991, the Constitution of the Czech Republic in 1992, the Constitution of Lithuania in 1992, the Constitution of Estonia in 1992, the Constitution of Poland in 1997, the Constitution of Hungary in 2011).

Most of the Eastern European countries are members of the European Union. It includes Estonia and Latvia. Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Croatia. This also determines the specifics of the legal space of Eastern Europe, because the European Union is a confederation that forms a special legal system that has the highest legal force in relation to national legal systems [21, pp. 60-61]. Thus, in accordance with Articles I-33 of the Constitution of the European Union, "the European law is binding in all its parts and is subject to direct application in all member States". Nevertheless, the numerous practice of the Court of Justice of the European Union shows that legal decisions at the national level often differ from the principles and norms of the European Union[3].

Despite the rather significant influence of the EU legal space, it would be hasty to recognize the total westernization of Eastern European legal systems. For example, in some of the countries of Eastern Europe, there are signs of restoration of political traditions suppressed during the period of Soviet influence. Thus, on May 4, 1990, Latvia adopted the Declaration on the Restoration of Independence, which restored the Constitution of 1922, which remains in force to the present day [22, p. 79].

If we also consider Belarus, Ukraine and Russia, then we should mention the legal space of the CIS, which also partly affects the legal space of its member countries. However, the legal space of the CIS does not have the highest legal force in comparison with the national legal systems of the CIS countries. In support of this position, one can also cite the example of the existence of many model acts that do not oblige participating countries to adopt such norms, but create conditions for the formation of uniform norms through the voluntary implementation of such norms. And if we carry out an *internal classification* of the legal systems of Eastern Europe, then one of its criteria may be a sign of the extension of certain supranational norms to such a legal system, such as the norms of the legal system of the European Union or the law of the CIS.

With regard to liberal values, the legal position of Eastern European States often tends towards their non-recognition. For example, the Memorandum of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights on stigmatization of LGBT people (recognized as an extremist organization in Russia) in Poland dated December 3, 2020 states that Polish criminal legislation (articles 119, 256 and 257 of the Polish Criminal Code) partially contains indications of the inadmissibility of discrimination against people based on nationality, ethnicity, race or religious beliefs, but not based on sexual orientation or gender identity[4].

[3] Selection of major judgments. Year 2022. Research and Documentation Directorate of Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU). 2022. – 300 p.

[4] Memorandum on the stigmatisation of LGBTI people in Poland (CommDH(2020)27). URL:

ISSN 2658-4050 (Online)

Thus, the peculiarity of the national mentality in Eastern European countries is the fundamental split between liberal and traditional values, which are associated with national identity and which legislators and law enforcement officers rely on at the level of national legal systems [23, pp. 613-614].

An example of an axiological contradiction between EU law and national Eastern European legal systems is the dispute over Hungarian legislation adopted in 2021, which prohibits the dissemination of information among minors that promotes or depicts "deviations from self-identification as men or women, gender reassignment or homosexuality" and a number of other similar decisions. The European Commission has appealed to the Court of Justice of the European Union to resolve this dispute. It is significant that only 16 out of 27 countries joined this lawsuit. The rest of the Eastern European countries (Czech Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania) refused to support this claim[5].

Axiological conflicts are currently also associated with the strengthening of the Roman Catholic Church after the fall of the communist regimes [23, p. 614]. One of the most famous examples of such influence in Eastern Europe is the issue of the ban on abortions in Poland. Since the early 90s, the Catholic Church and conservative political parties have repeatedly taken initiatives to completely ban abortions. In 1993, Parliament banned abortion, making three exceptions: danger to the health or life of the mother, preceding conception of the fetus, rape or incest, and fetal abnormality. On September 23, 2016, deputies of the Polish Sejm adopted in the first reading a bill that almost completely bans abortions in the country and criminalizes up to 5 years in prison for the perpetrator of this manipulation and for the woman in labor. This caused a wave of mass protests, which grew into a nationwide protest on October 3, 2016, referred to as "Czarny Poniedziałek" ("Black Monday"), which subsequently led to the rejection of the bill[6]. However, on October 22, 2020, the Polish Constitutional Court declared illegal a woman's right to have an abortion if the fetus has a serious defect or incurable disease, which accounts for approximately 98% of the total number of abortions in Poland[7].

Due to the fact that the legal systems of Eastern Europe are influenced by both Western and Eastern factors, it is proposed to designate Eastern and Western legal culture as conditional "poles" for such a classification. Proximity to a certain pole on this scale is proposed to be determined by the following criteria. First, the criterion of the impact of the supranational legal system. On the one hand, the legal system of the European Union will have a strong influence and determine the factors that shape legislation and the specifics of law enforcement. On the other hand, the legal regulation of the CIS countries, although it does not have a determinative effect, creates conditions for the harmonization of legislation. Secondly, it is also proposed to focus on the historical criterion due to the fact that some Eastern European countries are turning to recreating previously existing legal acts, which even more reflect the influence of Western or Eastern legal cultures. Thirdly, it is also proposed to refer to how axiological conflicts are resolved in order to determine the relationship between the values formally declared in normative acts and the values translated into legal practice.

4. New explanatory and research models for revealing the content of the Eastern European legal family

Researchers who share the problem of false universalism do not specify exactly how it can be overcome. For example, the article by Saidov A.H. mentions the problem of studying "non-Western" legal traditions or legal systems [10]. This approach only allows us to detach from the Western legal tradition,

https://rm.coe.int/memorandum-on-the-stigmatisation-of-lgbti-people-in-poland/1680a08b8e (accessed: 09.12.2024).

[5] Sixteen EU countries denounce Hungary's new anti-LGBT law. Euronews website. URL: https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2021/06/22/thirteen-eu-countries-denounce-hungary-s-new-anti-lgbt-law (accessed: 09.12.2024).

[6] Polish women went on a mass strike against the ban on abortions. TASS News Agency website. URL: https://tass.ru/obschestvo/3672766 (accessed: 10.01.2026).

[7] The decision of the Constitutional Court of Poland dated October 22, 2020. Legislative Bulletin of the Republic of Poland. URL: https://dziennikustaw.gov.pl/DU/2021/175 (accessed: 09.12.2024).

but does not specify which tradition we are talking about: the Eastern or, perhaps, other unnamed world traditions of law. Therefore, it is necessary, firstly, to determine which legal family the legal systems of Eastern Europe belong to, and secondly, to describe which methodological approach will be relevant to overcome the problem of false universalism in comparative law.

If we consider the ideological criterion deduced by R. Leger for distinguishing legal families, it is possible to hypothesize that a suitable option for describing the legal space of Eastern Europe is the point of view that such legal systems belong to the Slavic legal family. Despite the fact that, as V.A. Lafitsky himself points out, "there is a rapid fermentation process in which the new Slavic law is crystallizing," although "its contours have not yet taken shape" [6, P. 266], there are quite convincing arguments for a similar historical past and a common socio-cultural space. However, a counterargument to this thesis would also be relevant, based on the fact that some of the countries under consideration are inhabited mainly by non-Slavic populations and have followed a slightly different historical path, creating different prerequisites for the formation of legal values, and therefore some of the Eastern European states would not be correctly attributed to the Slavic legal family. It would be more relevant to assign them to a mixed legal family.

Due to the fact that relying on an ideological criterion does not allow us to clearly distinguish one legal family from another, for a more specific classification, a cross-section should be made not of ideology, but of axiology (values). Ideology is a formalized system of ideas that goes beyond a single worldview. In modern postmodern conditions or conditions close to those [24, pp. 219-220], the ideological criterion loses its relevance. Values are a more basic category, which makes it possible to determine with greater accuracy, among other things, the legitimacy of individual institutions or legal norms [25, p. 77].

However, the task of identifying such legal values is also not trivial. As follows from our description of the features of some Eastern European legal systems, in order to determine such values that manifest themselves in law, it is also important to validate them according to the criterion of their legitimization (or delegitimization). In this case, it is proposed to distinguish between legitimation in the political or sociological sense and legal legitimation proper. So, if we judge the non-recognition of the bill prohibiting abortions by the mass protests that took place in Poland and the conceptualization of these protests in the concept of "Black Monday", then in a political sense such a bill would be regarded as illegitimate. However, in terms of legal legitimation proper, which should be based on the criterion of validity of such norms, as well as taking into account the subsequent decision of the Constitutional Court of Poland in 2020, the researcher will come to the opposite conclusion that these norms are legitimate in the legal sense, since they are recognized by the law enforcement officer and do not lose their validity.

Of course, legitimation in the political sense, based on public reaction, which has no direct legal significance, although it may have some consequences for the legal system, may provide some information about values. However, the values identified in this way cannot be considered integrated into the legal system, even if they claim to be. Observing legitimation in the legal sense in the form of the reaction of state bodies and stable legal practices, on the contrary, can provide reliable results for describing values already integrated into the legal system [26, p. 505]. Therefore, for research conclusions, it is necessary to separate and rank the actors of legitimization and the result of their legitimization in terms of consequences and legal force.

5. Conclusions.

As Saidov A.Kh. notes, the prospects for the development of comparative law also lie in strengthening an interdisciplinary approach that allows combining the achievements of jurisprudence with sociology, philosophy, economics and cultural studies. Such an integrative study of legal traditions opens up new opportunities for the analysis of legal systems [10, p. 12]. As demonstrated in this study, this thesis is confirmed and allows us to solve a specific research problem about the relevance of Eastern European legal systems to a mixed legal family, in which part of the legal systems can be attributed to the Slavic legal

family. The remaining legal systems should be attributed to the classical Romano-Germanic legal family with features determined depending on recognized and reproduced legal values. The prerequisites for substantiating this conclusion were a shift in focus from the analysis of a not entirely universal criterion of legal ideology to the consideration of a more basic criterion of legal axiology, as well as the proposal of a toolkit that allows a more differentiated definition of values relevant to the relevant legal system through the analysis of the legitimacy of institutions and norms.

In addition, an internal classification of the legal systems of Eastern Europe was proposed according to several criteria discussed above. First, the criterion of the impact of a supranational legal system (for example, the European Union or the CIS). Secondly, it is a historical criterion that is relevant due to the fact that some Eastern European countries are turning to recreating previously existing legal acts. Thirdly, the criterion for resolving axiological conflicts, which serves to distinguish between declared and actually reproduced values in law.

ISSN 2542-1514 (Print)

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BIBLIOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

Denisenko V.V., Malyshkin S.P. Features of the legal systems classification in Eastern Europe in the context of the axiological approach and the legal systems legitimacy. *Pravoprimenenie = Law Enforcement Review*, 2026, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 5–14. DOI: 10.52468/2542-1514.2026.10(1).5-14. (In Russ.).