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DOI : 10.14746/rie.2016.10.13

## The politicization of Europe – Polish media coverage of the EU presidency

### Introduction

Covering European events is a relatively new topic in the post-communist Central European countries. Earlier studies on the media coverage of the European events and policy showed that Polish media present a positive, but rather simplified picture of Europe and the EU (Ociepka 1998; Ociepka, 2005; Świerszczyński, 2004). More recent studies revealed, however, that Polish media do not pay much attention to the EU events (Ociepka, 2011), and the first Polish EU Council presidency in 2011 was not an exception from that rule (Stępińska, 2013a; Kolczyński, 2013).

Nevertheless, in Poland, as in many European countries, the pro-, or anti-EU attitude is a significant component of the political parties' identities and an element of diversification strategy used by political actors during the election campaigns. Even in the 1990s, before Poland's accession to the EU, political parties and candidates for president included European issues in their election agendas (Stępińska, 2004a; Stępińska, 2004b). In 2011, when Poland hold its first EU presidency (July 1 till December 31), the parliamentary elections took place on October 9, 2011. Since the election campaign reached the final stage soon after Poland took a lead in the EU Council, one could expect that Donald Tusk's government would take advantage of the presidency during the competition with its political rivals. On the other hand, political opposition could use any mistake and problem related to the presidency as an argument against the government.

This paper aims to present the findings of the analysis of the content of selected Polish print media regarding the coverage of the Polish EU presidency<sup>1</sup>. The study concentrates on the relation between political bias of selected Polish daily newspapers and weekly magazines and their evaluation of Poland's presidency in the European Union Council with regard to two concepts: Europeanization of public sphere and politicization of Europe. While previous studies on the Polish media coverage of the first Polish EU presidency were focused mostly on domestication of the EU-related topics (Stępińska, 2013a; Stępińska, 2013b; Stępińska, Secler, 2014), the theoretical approach of politicization and Europeanization provides an opportunity to recognize the other side of media role in political debate over the European issue.

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<sup>1</sup> Research project: *Prezydencja polska w Radzie Unii Europejskiej i Euro 2012: rola wydarzeń medialnych w kształtowaniu wizerunku państwa* [The Polish EU Presidency and Euro2012: the role of media events in creating a state's image] sponsored by the Polish National Science Center, grant no. N N116 614440.

### Theoretical background

European public sphere is a complex phenomenon that can be described alongside with a shared pan-European transnationalization of historically mainly national political public spheres. Within media and communication studies, it is a well-accepted starting point to distinguish a “vertical” from a “horizontal” dimension of Europeanization. While the former means an increasing ‘monitoring’ of Europe and the EU in the public sphere of each country, the latter terms an increasing ‘monitoring of’ and ‘discussing with’ other European countries (Wessler et. al., 2008; Koopmans, Stathman, 2010; Hepp et al., 2016).

The deficit of European public sphere was identified as a major stumbling block of the European integration process. This criticism comprises the general problem of Europeanization of political competences, for instance in monetary politics, that is accompanied by a lacking feedback of European citizens (Adam, Berkel, 2003, p. 1). Since the European public sphere is a prerequisite to establish mechanisms of connecting political decision making to people, the deficit of the European public sphere is often regarded as a part and as one of the origins of the democratic deficit (Offerhaus, Mollen, Hepp, 2014; Hepp et al., 2016).

At the same time, any debate over European issues is run by politicians and covered by media according to their political orientations and goals. This phenomenon might be described as a ‘politicization of Europe’, that is a strategic and pragmatic use of the European issues in a domestic political debates (and competition) by both politicians, and journalists. A concept of ‘politicization of Europe’ within ‘post-functional theory’ of European integration was suggested by L. Hooghe and G. Marks (2009). Hooghe and Marks perceive media as a critical arena for Europe to become part of politics, but – at the same time, they hold a negative view of the EU politicization. In fact, Hooghe and Marks claim that national media are only able to mediate information in a way that entrenches public attention to the nation.

P. Stathman and H. J. Trenz (Stathman, Trenz, 2013, p. 149) disagree with such a theoretical pessimism with regard to the media and the public. Against the backdrop of a post-functional theory of integration, the contours of which have been recently discussed within political science, they think that the dynamics of EU politicization can be better grasped from a public sphere perspective within the framework of what they call a ‘democratic functionalism’ approach (Stathman, Trenz, 2015).

In their view, the crucial field for investigating politicization is within the ‘mediated politics’, that political actors construct in the view of the public. Their study on a number of national referendums held in 2005 on a draft European constitution provided an opportunity to examine a level of Europeanization of public sphere, as well as politicization of Europe. Although Stathman and Trenz’s data analysis showed that political debates over Europe remain essentially national, with voters paying relatively little attention to foreign voices or issues, they were able to recognize conditions and mechanisms for the EU’s politicization defined as “bringing the public into EU politics” (Stathman, Trenz, 2013, p. 145).

This perspective assumes a close and positive relations between Europeanization, politicization, and democratization (see Stathman, Trenz, 2013; Risse, 2010; Risse,

2014; Koopmans, Statham, 2010). The emergence of European public sphere is here considered as 'enabling condition' for politicization (Risse, 2014; see also: Hutter, Grande, Kriesi, 2016). Politicization is valued positively because 'public debate and contestation occurs between a broad range of different political actors – executives, parties, interest groups, NGOs, social movements etc. – and, because it is mass mediated in front of a public' (Stathman, Trenz, 2013, p. 7). Empirical studies, however, show that debates over European issues are dominated by the political elite (Koopmans, 2007) and that contributors from political parties outnumber those from civil society (Stathman, Trenz, 2013). Moreover, radical Eurosceptic parties seem to be more visible in such debates than the EU supporters (Kriesi, 2014).

Mass media are the condition as well as the forum for public communication processes (Pfetsch, 1994, p. 12). However, much of the previous scholarship has shown that national media have weakly represented European actors and issues (see de Vreese, 2001; de Vreese, Peter, Semetko, 2001; Kevin, 2003; Wilke, Reinemann, 2007). While some tend to see national mass media as one major obstacle to further Europeanization of public spheres (Gerhards, 2000, p. 297, see: Adam, Berkel, 2003, p. 2), the others claim that the different European media systems offer varying opportunities for the Europeanization of public spheres.

Adam and Berkel (Adam, Berkel, 2003) followed Risse et al. (Risse et al., 2001) who showed that the adaptation of European policies into national politics varies among countries. What takes place is a "domestic adaptation with national colours" (Risse et al., 2001, p. 1), that depends on the goodness of fit between European processes and national political institutional settings, rules and practices. They claim that this argument can be extended to the characteristics of media systems that influence heavily the process of Europeanization of public spheres: The better a country's media system fits the requirements to depict European politics, the greater is the potential to find a Europeanized public sphere (Adam, Berkel, 2003, p. 4). In their comparative study on six European countries (France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, and UK) Adam and Berkel (Adam, Berkel, 2003) recognized two major dimensions that determine the opportunities of a Europeanization of media inducted public spheres: (1) the chances of access a national media system offers to the actors in the multi-level game that deeply depend on the plurality within the media system and (2) the capacity of the media system to convey complex and abstract political information.

They assess the plurality within the national media system in terms of the diversity of media outlets, the degree of concentration and the geographical diversity. Furthermore, Adam and Berkel (Adam, Berkel, 2003, p. 17) emphasize that culture, and political and economic logic are still the most relevant features not only to distinguish media cultures, but also to explain the possibility of a system to convey complex and abstract political information as they influence the way how communication processes look like.

Adam and Berkel (Adam, Berkel, 2003, p. 19) assumed that a media system with a strong political logic leads to a Europeanization of the public sphere, since European integration is widely regarded as a project of the political elite. The orientation of the media towards the political elite gives political actors a better starting position to get their ideas on the media agenda. As Kriesi (Kriesi, 2001, p. 8) noticed this agenda-

setting of the elites leads to a stronger focus on political information in the media system.

Hence, it is worth considering how a high level of political parallelism and an external pluralism of the media system (Halli Mancini, 2004) affect the media coverage of the EU-related topic. Poland may serve here as a case study due to the fact that media organizations mirror the political situation of the country and journalism tend to be strongly marked by political partisanship. A high level of political parallelism between a political system and media system is then supported by a high level of integration of media personnel and political elites who share the same opinions and values (Dobek-Ostrowska, Głowacki, 2008). Moreover, journalists working for some of newspapers are deeply involved into politics as commentators and publicists presenting their own opinions. K. Jakubowicz (Jakubowicz, 1999, p. 24) described this style of journalism as combining “a didactic journalistic norm, leadership and guardianship/stewardship roles *vis-à-vis* the audience, a special form of the social responsibility paradigm, a critical/dialectic role in society, assigning to the audience mostly the roles of pupils, citizens, partisans, and followers”.

As a result one may observe not only politicization of Europe, but also an instrumentalization of Europe: since the media's focus on topics of the elite, political actors (and politically oriented journalists) may promote and discuss the abstract and complex issues, such as EU integration (Adam, Berkel, 2003, p. 19), while employing the EU-related issues to the domestic political competition at the same time, especially during the election campaign periods.

### The study

A quantitative content analysis addressed following research questions: (RQ1) How often was political domestic perspective used in the media coverage of the EU Presidency? (RQ2) How did the Polish media portray and evaluate the Polish EU presidency? (RQ3) What were the main sources of opinions and evaluations? and (RQ4) To what extent did political orientation of a media organization affect the coverage and evaluation of the Polish EU presidency?

In the study we distinguished between 12 main topic categories that could be found in the items related to the Polish EU presidency. One of them was domestic politics. Due to the fact that the parliamentary elections were held in Poland in 2011, that is during the Polish EU presidency, one could assume that political domestic perspective will be frequently used in the media coverage of the EU presidency in Poland (H1).

The articles published by the press were examined in terms of the assessments of the Polish presidency formulated by their authors or contributors. Four categories of evaluation were identified in the codebook in order to examine whether the assessments and opinions were free from bias or irony towards the Polish government and other entities or individuals actively involved in the Polish presidency. Namely, these were following categories: (1) positive; (2) negative; (3) both positive and negative; or (4) neutral. Since all the major events related to the Presidency were organized by the

government of Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform] and Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe [Polish People's Party] and its agents, we may assume that journalists from the anti-governmental media organizations would criticize the political parties in power by providing negative evaluation of their performance during the EU Presidency period. Thus, we propose a hypothesis (H2) that the coverage will be biased and affected by the political angle of the news organization.

The data come from the research project devoted to study the role of media events in creating a state's image (see: Stępińska, 2012; Stępińska, 2013b; Stępińska, Secler, 2014). The key word used to select the items for a study was *presidency (of the EU Council)*. The timeframe encompassed 18 weeks, namely periods of June 15–July 30, 2011; September 1–October 31, 2011; and December 1, 2011–January 15, 2012. The analysis concerned four daily newspapers and three weekly magazines. The choice of media organizations was based on a type of the media (quality newspapers and tabloids), circulation, and political orientation. Based on these criteria, we selected following media organizations: (1) “Gazeta Wyborcza” – a nationwide, socio-political, rather liberal news daily, owned by the Agora S.A. media concern; (2) “Rzeczpospolita” – a nationwide news daily of a socio-political, economic and legal profile. It defines itself as “the only conservative-liberal journal in Poland”; (3) “Nasz Dziennik” – a nationwide Catholic-nationalistic daily published by the Spes sp. z o.o. – a limited liability company. The daily was initiated in January 1998 by Rev. Tadeusz Rydzyk, the founder of the ultra-Catholic *Radio Maryja*; (4) “Fakt” – a nationwide daily tabloid, published since 2003 by Axel Springer Polska, a part of the Axel Springer AG media concern; (5) “Polityka” – a nationwide socio-political opinion-forming weekly that has been present on the Polish market since 1957; (6) “Wprost” – a nationwide socio-political opinion-forming weekly published in Warsaw by Platforma Mediowa Point Group; (7) “Uważam Rze. Inaczej pisane” – a nationwide politico-economic opinion-forming weekly published by Presspublica since 2011. The weekly is written in cooperation with the “Rzeczpospolita” daily and is right-wing oriented.

## Findings

### *Political domestic perspective*

Table 1 shows that as few as four topics were covered in as many as 89 per cent of all the items related to the EU presidency. Among all the items that covered the main theme (the Polish EU presidency), almost 35 per cent was devoted to international politics, including relations between the EU and Poland, and between Poland and other countries. However, almost 22 per cent of the items framed the EU Presidency within a domestic politics. Interestingly, Polish press paid relatively much attention to cultural events organized during the Polish EU Presidency. In fact, they were covered even more frequently than economic crisis, that was the major problem of the EU countries at that time.

Table 1

**Main topics in Polish newspapers (N = 767)**

Topic	Frequency	Percent
International politics	266	34.8
<b>Internal politics</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>21.8</b>
Culture	128	16.7
Economy	112	15.8
Social relations	20	2.6
Human interest	17	2.2
Justice and crime	11	1.4
Military and defence	8	1.0
Science and technology	8	1.0
Environment	7	0.9
Sport	2	0.3
Accidents and disasters	2	0.3
Other	10	1.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>767</b>	<b>100.0</b>

One may observe differences between media organizations under study. “Gazeta Wyborcza” focused mostly on international politics (36 per cent of all the items published in that newspaper) and cultural events (21 per cent), while domestic politics was the main topic of 14 per cent of the items. In “Rzeczpospolita” almost 35 per cent of the items covered international politics, while 22 per cent – economy. Culture and domestic politics stand for 17.5 per cent and 16 per cent of the items, respectively. In “Nasz Dziennik” the highest number of the items was devoted to internal politics (35 per cent), while international politics was covered in 29 per cent of the items. In the tabloid *Fakt* both domestic and international politics stand for around 40 per cent (39.3 and 42.6 per cent, respectively).

Among the magazines under the study, it was “Uważam Rze” that published more articles devoted to domestic politics (32.4 per cent) than to international politics (7 per cent). Two other magazines: “Polityka” and “Wprost” paid more attention to relations between the EU countries than domestic politics while covering the EU presidency. It means that two the most anti-governmental at that time media organizations, namely “Nasz Dziennik” and “Uważam Rze”, perceived the first Polish EU presidency mostly from a perspective of domestic politics.

*The assessments: daily newspapers*

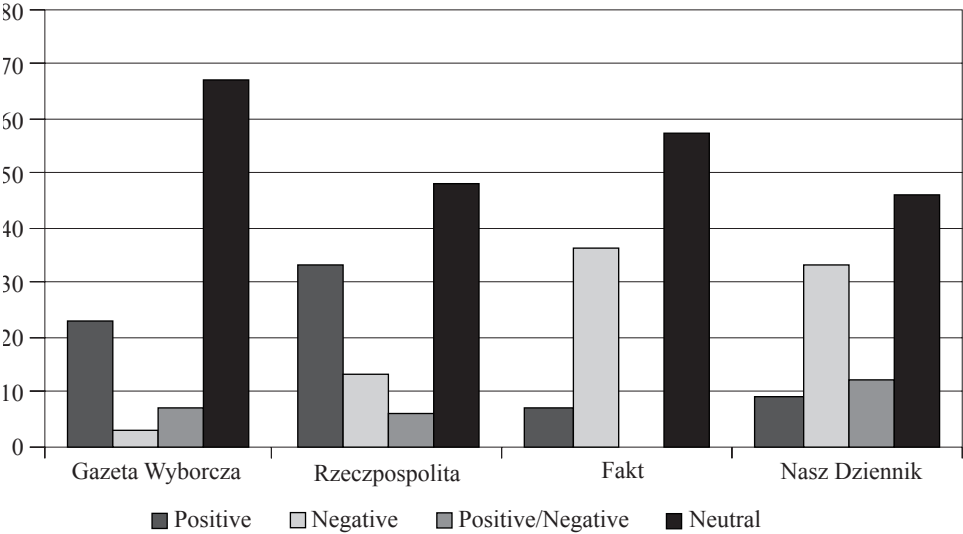
Taking into consideration the political bias of selected newspapers one could expect significant differences in their assessments of whether a given event or initiative should be deemed to be a success or failure of the Polish presidency. The dailies, however, did not demonstrate a strong emotional attitude to the cabinet that held the presidency, thus exhibiting defined political sympathies. It was a neutral assessment that prevailed in “Gazeta Wyborcza” (67 per cent) and a tabloid “Fakt” (57 per cent). The portion of neutral assessments was lower by over a dozen in “Rzeczpospolita” (48 per cent),

while in “Nasz Dziennik” they accounted for 46 per cent of all the printed material (see Graph 1).

However, in a conservative and extremely anti-governmental daily newspaper “Nasz Dziennik” one third of opinions on the Polish presidency was negative. Speaking of the Polish presidency, the newspaper primarily criticized Prime Minister Donald Tusk and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski, accusing them of an incompetence in ruling, a submissiveness towards the heads and leaders of European Union states, and a lack of defense of Polish national interests. The titles of numerous items were indicative of the clearly negative tone of assessments and opinions, for instance: *Sikorski a sprawa polska* [Sikorski versus the Polish cause], *Polską suwerenność oddam tanio* [Polish sovereignty for sale – cheap], *Jak najdalej od polskości* [As far from Polishness as possible], *Polityczny makijaż Platformy* [PO’s political make-up], *Dawniej Moskwa, dziś Bruksela* [Moscow yesterday, Brussels today], *Z pamiętnika Donalda cudotwórcy* [From the diary of Donald the miracle-worker].

Similar number of per cent (36) of negative opinions could be found in “Fakt”, while positive assessments of the Polish presidency accounted in this newspaper for fewer than 7 per cent of all items. “Fakt”, although being a tabloid seems to be involved in a political debate by inviting politicians to share their comments and opinions (Piontek, Hordecki, 2009). At the same time, most of the items on politics is strongly critical (not only of the government, but the entire political class) and biased. In fact, many of the articles include some elements of populism and demagogy.

**Graph 1. The assessments in daily newspapers**



Source: Media Coverage of the Polish EU Presidency Project.

On the other hand, the highest proportion of positive assessments was recorded for “Rzeczpospolita” (34 per cent). Nevertheless, this newspaper published also a relatively high portion (13 per cent) of critical (negative) assessments and opinions of Polish

presidency. The other high quality daily newspaper – “Gazeta Wyborcza” published a smaller number of positive assessments than “Rzeczpospolita”, namely 23 per cent, and a very small number of negative assessments (only 3 per cent). Although “Gazeta Wyborcza” was more enthusiastic about the presidency, on numerous occasions treating it as an opportunity for Poland in Europe, in terms of politics as well as image, it seems to stay more neutral while reporting the event.

The codebook included also a category of *both positive and negative evaluation* in order to recognize items combining critique with some elements of approval for Poland’s performance during the EU presidency. This attitude might be perceived as an attempt to present a balanced, but not neutral, picture. Interestingly, this type of comment was rather rarely used by authors of opinions publishing in daily newspapers. The highest percentage of such items were found in “Nasz Dziennik” (12 per cent), while “Gazeta Wyborcza” and “Rzeczpospolita” published only 7 per cent and 6 percent of this kind of items, respectively. It is worth mentioning that “Fakt” featured the most clear assessments in that matter, as the category of both positive and negative never occurred. It seems that journalists rather attempted to avoid any comments or represented a clear (positive or negative) attitude towards activities of the Polish government and any other institution involved into activities related to the presidency of the EU Council.

#### *The assessments: quality weekly magazines*

Depending on the features of the media systems, weekly magazine may either represent one political angle or attempt to draw a broader picture of the events and issues by providing more than one perspective. In media systems with a high level of political parallelism one may expect rather the former option, than a latter.

Positive assessments of the Polish presidency prevailed in two out of the three magazines under the study. They accounted for 46 per cent of all assessments in “Wprost”, and for 34 per cent in “Polityka”. The third magazine examined, “Uważam Rze”, diverged significantly from the above two in terms of the positive assessment of the presidency. Its positive assessment amounted to only 5 per cent of all opinions. Negative opinions prevailed in this magazine. The results of the studies indicate that there were as many as 54 per cent of them (see Graph 2). Therefore, it can be noticed that the majority of both the journalists and contributors to this weekly could be associated with the right side of the political stage and can be perceived as critics of Donald Tusk’s administration.

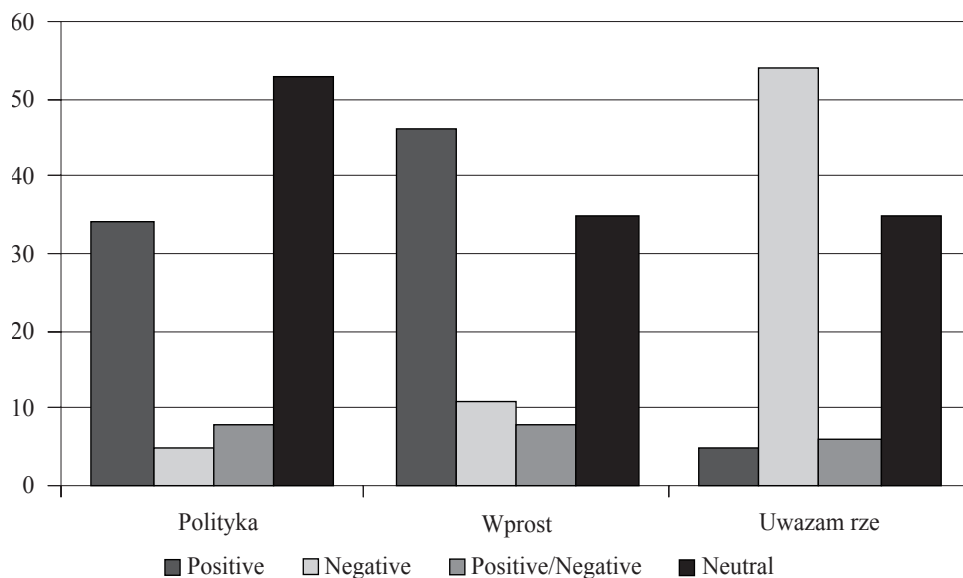
The number of negative opinions published in “Polityka” was the same as that of positive ones in “Uważam Rze”. The sample evidenced that the negative opinions on the Polish presidency published in “Wprost” accounted for slightly over 11 per cent of all the examined texts in this magazine. The number of both positive and negative assessments was comparable in all the opinion-forming magazines analyzed, oscillating around 5–7 per cent.

As far as neutral assessments are concerned, it should be emphasized that “Polityka” published the largest portion of them, accounting for 52 per cent, in comparison



to 35 per cent of neutral assessments identified by the study in the samples examined in “Wprost” and “Uważam Rze”. Although a number of neutral opinions is comparable, the three magazines show significant differences in other categories of the sample examined. Positive assessments prevailed in “Wprost”, while negative comments accounted for only a few percent there. The proportion was opposite in “Uważam Rze”.

**Graph 2. Assessments in quality weekly magazines**



**Source:** Media Coverage of the Polish EU Presidency Project.

It is worth mentioning that positive opinions on the presidency were more frequent – in total – in the weeklies (29 per cent) than in the dailies (18 per cent). At the same time, the disproportion between the dailies and weeklies was insignificant as far as negative opinions are concerned (21 and 24 per cent respectively). However, one should consider the differences in frequency of publishing each medium and a total number of items published in the period of the study (altogether 612 items published in daily newspapers and 101 in weekly magazines).

Neutral opinions prevailed in daily newspapers counted together: in as many as 54 per cent items journalists or other commentators avoided any evaluation of the Polish EU presidency. Weekly magazines altogether published 41 per cent of such articles. However, differences between media organizations were quite considerable, ranging from 35 per cent in the weekly magazine “Wprost” to 67 per cent in the daily high quality newspaper “Gazeta Wyborcza”.

In particular, the study revealed significant differences between content of daily newspaper “Rzeczpospolita” and weekly magazine “Uważam Rze” – two titles sharing the same publisher. Although both media organizations used to belong to the same owner and hired the same group of publicists at that time, positive opinions in “Rzeczpospolita” accounted for as many as 33 per cent, while there were only 5 per cent

of them in “Uważam Rze”. A similar disproportion is reflected in case of negative opinions with 13 per cent in “Rzeczpospolita” and 54 per cent in “Uważam Rze”. It is worth mentioning that in a 18-week period “Rzeczpospolita” published 246 items expressing any evaluation or opinion, while “Uważam Rze” 37 items. It means that only 2 out of 37 items in “Uważam Rze” included some elements of approval for Poland’s (or, in fact, Polish government’s) performance. At the same time as many as 20 items were profoundly critical.

Interestingly, in both of these media organizations almost the same group of journalists and commentators covered and commented on the Polish presidency in the first months of the term. It seems that journalists perceived their role differently depending on a type of media outlet they were publishing in at that time. While in “Rzeczpospolita” they were focused on providing more complex picture of government’s activities, in “Uważam Rze” they expressed their criticism openly. In late 2011 more radical right-wing journalists and commentators left “Rzeczpospolita” and started working exclusively for “Uważam Rze”. Not surprisingly, their comments became even more directly critical against the government and its performance.

#### *Genres and sources of opinions*

One could expect that daily newspapers will provide mostly news, while weekly magazines will publish more columns and news commentary items and reviews. Against that assumption, altogether, as many as 59 per cent of all the items under the study in “Fakt”, 55 per cent in “Nasz Dziennik”, 46.3 per cent in “Gazeta Wyborcza”, and 38.2 per cent in “Rzeczpospolita” were of non-news genres (columns, news commentary, interviews, quest contributions). Similar amount of publicist items were published in weekly magazines: in “Polityka” 57.9 per cent items were coded as news commentary, in “Wprost” – 42.3 per cent, and in “Uważam Rze” – 67.6 per cent.

In particular, as many as 22 per cent of all the items in “Gazeta Wyborcza” was news commentary, while in “Rzeczpospolita” it was 14.6 per cent and in “Fakt” – 24.6 per cent, and in “Nasz Dziennik” – 6.3 per cent. In “Nasz Dziennik” as many as 13 per cent of the items were columns, 17.5 per cent – guest contributions, and 12 per cent – interviews. In “Fakt” 19.7 per cent of the items were columns.

Therefore, a content analysis of these items seems to be crucial to learn more about the media coverage of the EU-related issues. While studying items including opinions, comments and reviews, we decided to check who had an opportunity to present their points of view. Interestingly, journalists and reporters were authors of almost half of the opinion items published in “Gazeta Wyborcza” (44 per cent) and “Rzeczpospolita” (43 per cent). In all weekly magazines the numbers were even higher: 83 per cent in “Polityka”, 67 per cent in “Uważam Rze”, and 52 percent in “Wprost”. Media organizations invited external sources of opinion less frequently.

Although the topic required a deep knowledge on both domestic and foreign politics, as well as on international relations and the EU policy, experts’ opinions were in some media presented even less frequently than politicians’ opinions. For example, in “Gazeta Wyborcza” 31 per cent of the opinion items included comments expressed

by either a national or foreign politician, while only half of this number (16 per cent) presented experts' opinions. Similar tendency one may observe in "Rzeczpospolita", although in that case national experts were interviewed (or invited to write their own text) more frequently, namely in 21 per cent of the items. "Rzeczpospolita", "Nasz Dziennik", "Fakt" and all weekly magazines hardly ever or never published items with a comment of any foreign expert.

At the same time, national politicians were often invited by some of the media organizations to present their opinions. In "Fakt" one third of all authors of opinions were national politicians (and neither foreign politicians, nor foreign experts), in "Nasz Dziennik" and "Gazeta Wyborcza" more than 20 percent, while "Polietyka" and "Wprost" did not publish any text presenting exclusively opinions of any Polish politician. As expected, "Nasz Dziennik" published mostly right-wing politicians. The opinions of left-wing politicians, or those from the current administration, were not presented in this newspaper.

It is worth mentioning that foreign authors' (politicians' and experts') opinions were presented significantly less frequently than national ones. For example, in "Nasz Dziennik", where 29 per cent of the opinions were expressed by national experts, only 1 per cent of the comments' authors were foreign experts. Even in high quality daily newspapers such as "Gazeta Wyborcza" and "Rzeczpospolita" foreign experts were authors of as few as 4 per cent and 2 per cent of the opinion items, respectively.

### **Discussion and conclusions**

Taking into consideration the characteristics of Polish media system (external pluralism) and context (parliamentary elections), in this paper we proposed a hypothesis (H1) that political domestic perspective would be frequently used in a media coverage of the EU Presidency in Poland. The findings showed that around 22 per cent of the items were indeed directly related to domestic politics, while one third of the items covered international politics (including relations between the EU and Poland, and between Poland and other countries). Significant number of items covered also the EU – related economic and cultural issues. One may conclude that domestic perspective was significantly present in the media coverage of the EU presidency, but it was not a predominant one.

At the same time, journalists seemed to be more interested in presenting their own opinions and the opinions of national politicians, than national or foreign experts. As a result, one may have got a sense that domestic framework of the media coverage of the EU presidency prevailed. The fact that Polish printed media under the study published many commentary items and most of these were written by staff members fits perfectly the traditional and still dominant model of Polish journalism with a strong watchdog role combined with a commentary one (Stępińska, Ossowski, Pokrzycka, Nowak, 2012).

In the media systems with a high level of political paralellism, media organizations represent partucular political orientations and support/criticize particular political actors. Hence, we proposed a hypothesis (H2) that media coverage would be politically

biased and we would be able to recognize this bias while studying the way newspapers evaluated the Poland's performance during the EU presidency. This hypothesis was confirmed. Indeed, the newspapers with an anti-government orientation provided more negative evaluation of the presidency. Namely, in "Uważam Rze" more than half of the items expressed negative evaluation and in "Nasz Dziennik" one third of all materials included some critique of the government and its performance. It is worth mentioning that also "Fakt" was highly critical, but in this case the tabloid profile of the newspaper may be a reason for focusing mostly on negative events or aspects of particular political issues.

At the same time, two weekly magazines, "Polityka" and "Wprost" presented rather positive image of the Polish EU Presidency. In "Wprost" almost a half of all items including any evaluation provided a positive opinion, while in "Polityka" one third of the evaluations was positive. The most balanced picture of the Polish EU Presidency was drawn by "Gazeta Wyborcza". Surprisingly, "Rzeczpospolita", despite of its political orientation, provided rather balanced image of the Poland's performance.

We may assume that the more neutral or balanced attitude towards the EU – related issues media present, the higher quality the debate over the EU is. In case of the media coverage of the Polish EU presidency, media – except "Uważam Rze" and "Wprost" – provided neutral evaluation more often than any other. In "Uważam Rze" negative evaluation of the Polish government's performance prevailed. On the other hand, "Wprost" was the only media organizations under the study with a higher percentage of the items expressing positive assessment than any other type of evaluation.

Politicization of the EU-related topics can be regarded – as Stathman and Trenz (Stathman, Trenz, 2013) claim – a consequence of Europeanization of public sphere and a political logic of the media. However, employing the EU-related topics in a domestic political competition (elections) can be also seen as an instrumentalization of the EU. Still, following a 'democratic functionalism' approach (Stathman, Trenz, 2015) one may argue that we observe a vertical Europeanization of public sphere. In fact, most of political actors in the European countries define themselves at domestic political scene by their attitudes towards the EU. In media systems with a high level of political parallelism the same can be said about the media organizations.

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### Summary

This paper aims to present the findings of the quantitative analysis of the content of selected Polish print media regarding the coverage of the Polish EU presidency. The study concentrates on the relation between political bias of selected Polish daily newspapers and weekly magazines and their evaluation of Poland’s presidency in the European Union Council with regard to two concepts: Europeanization of public sphere and politicization of Europe. The findings showed that national political perspective was used not only by political actors, but also by the journalists while covering European issues. However, the study provides arguments supporting the assumption on not only an instrumentalization of Europe during the parliamentary elections in Poland, but also on a politicization of Europe as inter-related with a vertical Europeanization of public sphere and democratization.

**Key words:** media, public sphere, European Union, politicization, Europeanization

## **Polityzacja Europy. Obraz prezydencji w Radzie UE w polskich mediach**

### **Streszczenie**

Celem artykułu jest ukazanie wyników badania zawartości polskich mediów z okresu sprawowania przez Polskę przewodnictwa w Radzie Unii Europejskiej w 2011 roku. Analiza poświęcona była wpływowi orientacji politycznej organizacji medialnej (wybranych gazet codziennych i tygodników opinii) na sposób relacjonowania polskiej prezydencji. Podstawę teoretyczną badania stanowiły dwie koncepcje: europeizacji sfery publicznej oraz polityzacji Europy. Wyniki badania nie tylko potwierdzają różnice w prezentowaniu tematyki europejskiej i polskiej prezydencji w tytułach o wyraźnie określonej orientacji politycznej, ale ukazują specyfikę polskich mediów: źródłem cen i poglądów prezentowanych na łamach są nie tylko politycy, ale także dziennikarze. Na podstawie wyników wyprowadzić można wniosek nie tylko o instrumentalnym wykorzystywaniu tematyki europejskiej podczas parlamentarnej kampanii wyborczej w Polsce w 2011 roku, ale także o polityzacji Europy jako zjawiska związanego ściśle z wertykalną europeizacją sfery publicznej i demokratyzacją.

**Słowa kluczowe:** media, sfera publiczna, Unia Europejska, polityzacja, europeizacja

