

### New Trends and New Phenomena in the Polish Media Market

When in 1989, discussions on the functioning of the social means of mass communication in the newly emerged situation were held, none of the participants could even anticipate how far the solutions promoted then would evolve.

However, both parties fully realized that the possession of the media, control over them and the ability to communicate with the public through them are indispensable prerequisites for obtaining social support. Moreover, upon the inauguration of the negotiations within working groups dealing with the media, representatives of the opposition clearly pointed out that, without reaching a consensus on this particular issue, it would be difficult to expect an agreement in other areas<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, Solidarity demanded access to the media, including newsprint and access to television. Specifically, the postulates then proposed are as follows:

- *opposition access to radio and television,*
- *equitable distribution of newsprint,*
- *consent for and allocation of a certain amount of newsprint to Solidarity's new publications of a nationwide and regional reach*
- *legalization of underground publications,*
- *liberalization of laws regulating the operation of censorship,*
- *waiver of the requirement to obtain a licence for publishing activities,*
- *reinstatement of people dismissed after martial law had been declared; condemnation and departure from the practice of dismissing journalists for political reasons,*
- *ban on the confiscation of foreign publications by customs<sup>2</sup>.*

Professor T. Goban-Klas emphasises, and he is right in this respect, that the relevance of the postulates voiced varied considerably and the opposition party assumed in advance that the government (or the coalition) would disapprove of part of the demands. Solidarity's

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<sup>1</sup> T. Goban-Klas: *Niepokorna orkiestra medialna. Dyrygenci i wykonawcy polityki informacyjnej w Polsce po 1989 roku*. Warsaw 2004, p. 276.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 277.

demands to take over one television channel and one radio channel were rejected as being unrealistic. Furthermore, aware of the impact of television, the government rejected Solidarity's proposal concerning presenting their own half-hour programmes within the time slots scheduled for the opposition. In the end, Solidarity gained the opportunity to present their thirty-minute programmes once a week, though it was subject to censorship<sup>3</sup>.

If we consider the demands of Solidarity from the contemporary perspective and the way Polish media system looks like nowadays, then even not a very penetrating observer may be astounded by the change that has occurred in this sphere of socio-political life. According to Stanisław Mock, these changes are of a twofold nature. Firstly, as it has already been outlined in the introduction, they resulted from the systemic transformation and democratic transition in Poland. Thus, they were structural changes that involved, *inter alia*, the introduction of freedom of expression, decentralization and privatization of the media. Other changes stemmed from technological and globalizational variations, which have promoted new means of communication and unknown ways of using global information resources<sup>4</sup>. Finally, global trends in the media such as tabloidisation, strict segmentation of readers and unification of different categories of the media deserve to be mentioned here as well.

The very phenomenon of evolution should not be surprising as each of the media systems evolves; whether it is Britain, the United States, France or Russia, the media market is subject to continuous alterations. However, the questions whether or not these changes are acceptable to citizens, whether the change occurring within the media follows the desired direction and whether it improves the media, seem to be of higher importance. Unfortunately, it appears to me that, even though the very process of evolution of the Polish media is impossible to deny, it is much more difficult to prove that it is beneficial to average recipients.

#### 1. Changes arising from the systemic transformation

Developments in this area resulted in the creation of the electronic media market regulator – the National Broadcasting Council, established by the Act of 29 December 1992. It would be a truism to state that it is infeasible to institute such process of appointing members of this body that would completely separate them from political pressures of their superiors. Unfortunately, we face an ever-growing process of politicization of this institution in Poland, what, in turn, leads to an immense lowering of its prestige. It affects primarily the public broadcaster which should serve its audience through carrying out the entrusted

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<sup>3</sup> T. Goban-Klas, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

<sup>4</sup> S. Mocek: *Dziennikarze po komunizmie*. Warsaw 2006., pp. 93-94.

mission; it should be noted though that this mission is at times difficult to define<sup>5</sup>. However, the division into ‘us’ and ‘they’, generally reflecting a purely political sphere, can be observed in these media. Professor Maciej Mrozowski, when making a brief comparison of the public media shortcomings, also indicates the closing of the world of politics to society, lack of civic debate and deficiencies in the field of civic education, insufficient concern for providing the public with patterns of social adaptation, insufficient ideological openness and juxtaposing high culture with mass culture<sup>6</sup>. It should be pointed out at this point that, although in such countries as Britain and Germany, politicians exert a profound influence on appointing supervisory boards or other bodies controlling the public media, it does not translate directly into a visible influence of politicians on the current functioning of the media in neither of these states<sup>7</sup>. As Katarzyna Pokorna-Ignatowicz, researcher of the Polish media system asserts, the Polish political class should be expected to change its approach towards the public media and their role in a democratic society in general; above all, politicians need to understand what the control over the public media entails. Politicians have not yet realized the importance of the public media to the national discourse on issues socially relevant. The above is best epitomized by the manner in which the public television was managed by Wiesław Walendziak, Ryszard Miazek, Robert Kwiatkowski, Bronisław Wildstein and Andrzej Urbański. Each successive chairman of the public television – only to a lesser extent of the public radio – enhances the process of politicization of the public media<sup>8</sup>.

Another element closely related to the systemic transition was the privatization process launched on 22 March 1990 when the Law on the Liquidation of RSW (Robotnicza Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza – the Workers’ Cooperative Publishing House) was adopted. The process of privatization was to encompass more than 240 press titles as this was what the company owned at that time. Nevertheless, the total of about 80 press titles were sold, 6 were handed down without announcing a tender and 70 journalistic cooperatives, comprising various editorial boards, were created. A considerable part of the mentioned magazines either ceased to exist very quickly or were transferred to other publishers such as, investing in

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<sup>5</sup> A wide range of viewpoints concerning the functioning of the public media in various countries is presented in the work of Karol Jakubowicz See: K. Jakubowicz: *Media publiczne. Początek końca czy nowy początek*. Warsaw 2007.

<sup>6</sup> M. Mrozowski: [no title] – debate on the public media, [in:] *Rynek audiowizualny w Polsce. Ocena i perspektywy*, ed. by J. Adamowski, pp. 20-24. Cf.: K. Pokorna-Ignatowicz: *Spór polityczny wokół telewizji Polskiej*, [in:] *Media, władza, prawo*, ed. by M. Magoska, Kraków 2005, pp. 41-57.

<sup>7</sup> K. Konarska: *System mediów elektronicznych w Wielkiej Brytanii*. Toruń 2006, pp. 150-160; J. Adamowski, E. Stasiak-Jazukiewicz, B. Golka: *Wybrane zagraniczne systemy informacji masowej*. Warsaw 1996, pp. 138-139.

<sup>8</sup> Katarzyna Pokorna-Ignatowicz widely discusses the phenomenon of TVP changing its political preferences whenever a new chairman is appointed. See: K. Pokorna-Ignatowicz, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.

Poland since the early 1990s, Polskapresse (1994) and Orkla (1990). Thus, the original assumptions of creating a wide range of press titles uniting local communities did not eventually find their reflection in reality. Though it is true that the extent of the transformation process in Poland was not as substantial as in Hungary – where approximately 90% of press titles were taken over by the foreign, mainly German, capital – in the face of initial assumptions, however, this process can be hardly regarded as successful; especially in the light of the fact that Polskapresse significantly limited the average reader's possibility of choice in some cities as it attempted to take over certain press titles in order to merge or close them later (mergers involved the following press titles: *Dziennik Łódzki + Wiadomości Dnia* in Łódź, *Słowo Polskie + Gazeta Wroclawska + Wieczór Wrocławia* in Wrocław and *Wieczór Wybrzeża + Dziennik Bałtycki* in Gdańsk).

The two aforementioned processes, namely the politicization and privatization of the media, have seriously affected the local and regional press, where the cooperation between local authorities and the editorial, instead of being based on the model of independence or at least partnership, resembles the instructional and supervisory model which allows policy makers to treat the local newspaper as one of the self-government bodies. In the case when external pressures and political suggestions are reluctantly accepted by the editorial board, the publisher may face harassment (e.g. terminating tenancy) or the authorities create their own press title.

## 2. Changes related to global trends in the media.

As for the processes associated with global trends, which should probably raise concern among the readers of newspapers, the incessant tabloidisation and the ensuing aggressive fight for the reader should be mentioned in the first place. Obviously, it does not involve merely the process of the format change. The latter is, in fact, quite common and occurs rather without the loss of quality as it is evidenced by the changes that have recently affected such respected journals as British *The Times*, *The Independent*, German *Die Welt* or French *Le Figaro*. Such change is also being prepared by the editorial board of the daily *Rzeczpospolita* (change planned for 15 October this year); however, as the experience of the above mentioned press titles shows, the change from the broadsheet to compact format brings more gains than losses<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> *Rzeczpospolita, jak The Times*, Wirtualne Media, 25 September 2007, [http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/article/250135\\_Rzeczpospolita\\_jak\\_The\\_Times.htm](http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/article/250135_Rzeczpospolita_jak_The_Times.htm) (28.09.2007); S. Kucharski: 'Większa, bo mniejsza', *Press* 2007, No. 10, p. 6.

The process of tabloidisation of magazines regarded as opinion-forming that involves flattering less sophisticated tastes of readers should raise some concern. This includes, among others, publishing sensational information (frequently unverified) and likewise titles, ousting investigative journalism from the opinion-forming press (because it is labour- and time-consuming and requires substantial financial outlays), rejecting long journalistic forms in favour of concise information (it is enough to compare, for instance, the layout and content of *Gazeta Wyborcza* or *Rzeczpospolita* of the second half of the 1990s with their contemporary versions). Unfortunately, a similar process applies to opinion weeklies although, in this case, it is not particularly perceptible.

Tabloidisation is accompanied by an aggressive fight for the reader supported by marketing and editorial tricks or gadgets. It is increasingly difficult to find an influential daily or weekly in Poland which does not apply at least one of these forms of sales promotion. Even though using these forms of promotion helps maintain the expected circulation and sales, it unfortunately causes a strong decline in prestige as such methods of competition for customers 'migrated' to the market of opinion-forming press titles from the glossy magazines market. Therefore, newspapers and weeklies shed leaflets, advertising brochures, dozens of thematic supplements; every other newspaper is sold with a book, encyclopaedia or DVDs. The question thus arises whether people will stop buying newspapers if, one day, publishers discontinue inserting all these extras into their newspapers?

Another issue worth raising, when discussing the media transformation relating to global trends, is the unification of the media belonging to different categories. This unification is understood as a process in which press releases become shorter and more informative, though less analytical whereas television becomes to a greater extent only 'a newspaper with pictures' since, after reading the morning newspaper, it is possible to predict with a high degree of certainty what information will appear in the evening television news programmes – and a more discerning media expert will be even able to indicate the order of their presentation in the electronic media – unless, of course, anything spectacular happens in the course of the day. Hence, instead of carrying out the mission of delivering a thorough description of the reality, newspapers are simply becoming providers of news for television.

In this context, a considerable process of change can also be observed in the printed press as it is evidenced by the attitude of investigative journalists. At least thrice, it turned out that the basis for writing an article was an audio or video recording. Recordings which aroused great interest included notably the conversation between Adam Michnik and Lew Rywin as well as the one between Renata Beger and Adam Lipiński. The recording

confirming that Renata Beger was buying votes from Renata Jankowiak, a local activist of the Self-Defence triggered a little lesser scandal. In the first two cases, the recordings led to journalistic investigations and even the appointment of the *Sejm* investigative committees. The third material was a little more controversial due to the ambiguous guilt of the main protagonist and the absence of an extensive journalistic investigation. Notwithstanding, the recorded materials began to live their own lives, they were commonly used by the electronic media; Agora used them also on its website where the videos of recorded conversations can be viewed even today<sup>10</sup>. Nonetheless, it does not change the fact that among certain journalists, not only press reporters, the practice of secretly recording interviewees raises, if not dislike, then at least moral doubts what was indicated by Tomasz Lis or the investigative journalists – Cezary Łukaszewicz (*Polityka*) and Maciej Duda (*Newsweek Polska*)<sup>11</sup>.

The issue of the proceeding erosion of the informative function of the radio is of secondary importance in this context, though not less irritating. At the moment, radio has lost contact with listeners offering them mainly popular music instead of a spoken word; additionally, music is frequently formatted in the same way in most of the stations. In-depth information and reportage as well as intelligent music and individually designed programmes disappear from the radio.

The final issue concerns segmentation and different approaches of the publisher and the reader to the same press title. It is reflected in the fact that *publishers consider their product in terms of the type of information contained therein, thematic areas, the scope of circulation (...) while consumers perceive and rank titles by values they provide and functions they perform*<sup>12</sup>. Furthermore, all the above-mentioned changes, with particular reference to technological changes, have led to a situation in which the thesis that the daily press provides information says little about this medium. Information, as it has already been said, is also provided by both television and Internet services, and the latter often publish in-depth analyses which appear in the daily press less frequently. Thus, what determines the fact that people still want to buy newspapers? It seems that social functions which the press fulfils can be identified at this point. The need for prestige and recognition, highlighting social position

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<sup>10</sup> D. Uhlig: 'Jak Lipiński przekonywał Beger do wejścia do PIS', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 26 September 2006, <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/1,53600,3646253.html>; M. Kaćki, M. Kopiński: 'Jak Renata Beger podpisy kupowała', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 28 September 2007, <http://www.gazetawyborcza.pl/1,75478,4528083.html> (22.10.2007).

<sup>11</sup> For further reference, please see: M. Wszyńska: 'Odpalić pocisk', *Press*, No. 10, pp. 38-40.

<sup>12</sup> W. Izdebski: *W poszukiwaniu zaginionej Arki: czy prasa odnajdzie cechę unikalną?*, *Wirtualne Media*, 20 September 2007, [http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/article/244562\\_W\\_poszukiwaniu\\_zaginionej\\_Arki\\_czy\\_prasa\\_odnajdzie\\_ceche\\_u\\_nikalna.htm](http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/article/244562_W_poszukiwaniu_zaginionej_Arki_czy_prasa_odnajdzie_ceche_u_nikalna.htm) (27.09.2007).

and also, not less important, the desire to create social ties impel readers to purchase daily newspapers despite all these ‘contraindications’.

Finally, yet another issue that, this time, relates to the journalistic community itself should be mentioned. In recent years, it is fairly common to say that, approximately since the so-called Rywin affair, the journalistic community has been heavily divided and the Law and Justice Party’s rise to power even strengthened these divisions for various reasons. Insofar as it may be true when it comes to certain intensification of atomisational processes within the community, it is worth remembering that after 1989, journalistic circles have been united only at very few moments while actually remaining divided. It is evidenced by the existence of several journalistic associations which, as a result of historical turmoil, have not developed a liking for one another. Thus, the following can be identified: the Polish Journalists Association cooperating with the Media Ethics Council, the Association of Journalists of the Republic of Poland having its roots in the People’s Republic of Poland, the Catholic Association of Journalists and several trade unions (the Syndicate of Polish Journalists, the Journalists Trade Union, the Trade Union of Radio and Television Journalists). The situation is further complicated by the fact that many renowned journalists do not belong to any of the associations, what, in practice, often impedes not only the articulation of demands concerning freedom of expression or access to information, but also the struggle for social issues (e.g. forcing journalists to set up one-person companies to reduce editorial costs).

To recapitulate, it should be noted that, although the market offer regarding both the opinion-forming press and television increases in each subsequent year (new journals appear – *Dziennik, Polska*; new TV channels are launched – TVN 24, TVN CNBC, TV Business, TVP Info), a more sophisticated and demanding reader has fewer chances to encounter a satisfying product, what unfortunately does not inspire optimism. What is even worse, every effort made by publishers demonstrates that the emergence of new magazines in their offer does not particularly increase readership. Therefore, we face the phenomenon commonly called ‘cannibalisation’ which implies that the successive newly-created press titles deprive the already existing ones of their readers while the necessity of an increasingly fiercer struggle for the reader extorts changes described above. Unfortunately, even though this is not an optimistic vision, it is difficult to argue with the facts.

**Key words:**

National Broadcasting Council, RSW, Polskapersse, Orkla, Media Ethics Council

**Abstract:**

When in 1989, discussions on the functioning of the social means of mass communication in the newly emerged situation were held, none of the participants could even predict how far the solutions promoted then would evolve. However, both parties fully realized that the possession of the media, control over them and the ability to communicate with the public through them are indispensable prerequisites for obtaining social support.

Nowadays, we face such challenges as the politicization of the media, relentless struggle for audience and viewership, tabloidisation of broadcasts, cannibalisation of the press market. However, they are also accompanied by positive phenomena including new technologies associated with printing, constantly emerging new media projects or such innovations as the possibility of using the mobile media. They all prove that the Polish media market has radically changed over the last 20 years that elapsed since the Round Table agreements.

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