

Transparency, Mass Media, Security and Corruption in Polish Political Life

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Free journalism has existed in Poland for many years. However, free media can be spoken of only since the year of the formal political break - through, demonopolisation of the country and beginning of free market. These events date from 1989. No matter whether this was the year of first free elections of 4th June or the year of forming new government by Tadeusz Mazowiecki or lastly the year of passing the package of reforms the Balcerowicz's plan by Polish Parliament. What is important is that with the onset of the new century it is ten years since the citizens of Republic of Poland could take advantage of the freedom of speech in the system of free media existing on the free market.

The most significant heritage of the free journalism in Poland which was inherited from the communist epoch was strong belief that it had a special mission: cultural, educational or political. This belief seems to distinguish Polish media from western media where, although such belief also exists, market treatment of the products of journalism dominates. The journalists materials become therefore goods which have its productive value and market price.

Such treatment of media and their role is only at its start in Poland at present. This is because democracy and free market are merely "running in". In such situation the media are supposed to play an important role such as controlling the political elites.

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Gaining the political freedom and freedom of speech resulted in consequences influencing the extent of taking advantage of that freedom, from the freedom limited in a natural way by publishers and media owners to the freedom limited by law and morality.

Press expert prof Jerzy Mikułowski - Pomorski emphasized the problem in a slightly different way: Freedom should never be limited, however, the amount of thinking in journalism should grow as quickly as possible. Everything fits the concept of responsibility which should be covered by code of journalists morality joined with respect for the state.

Ryszard Kapuściński points out:

The media play a double role nowadays: it is a god with two faces. It is a source of information and it shapes the way of thinking of the mass audience who receives 99 percent of television and in such sense plays an integrational role.

Bearing that in mind there is no wonder that the struggle for influences in media becomes more and more vivid. The possibility of taking control of TV and radio stations and press gives the political groups powerful tools for winning bigger and bigger electorate. The result of such struggle is a division of Polish political scene which resulted in polarization of the media between pro - governmental and opposition. Obviously each TV or radio station or paper tries to convince the audience about their objectivity and being apolitical.

Their boards of supervisors and, which is of no less importance, the way of presenting and interpretation of facts from Polish political life give absolutely different conclusions¹.

The struggle for influence in the media, as probably one of the biggest threat to their freedom and sovereignty, is one of the most relative phenomena and example of dangerous penetrating the media by the politics.

Corruption is one of the biggest threats to not only the world of media but to politics as well. It is defined as using the public post for achieving personal or group benefits"². It appears in various forms, such as³ :

¹ Żakowski J., 1994, Coś w Polsce pękło, coś się skończyło, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 16-17 kwietnia 1994;

o mechanizmach korupcji na wysokich szczeblach władzy

²In polish law there is no definition of corruption.

-bribery,

-purchase of contracts,

-concessions or court decisions, avoiding customs, taxes, etc.

The real corruption takes place not only among politicians of higher rank but mostly among men of power of low ranks. That is because of the:

-bureaucracy,

-non - transparency of procedures connected with decision,

-too much administrative control,

-monopoles,

-system of protection,

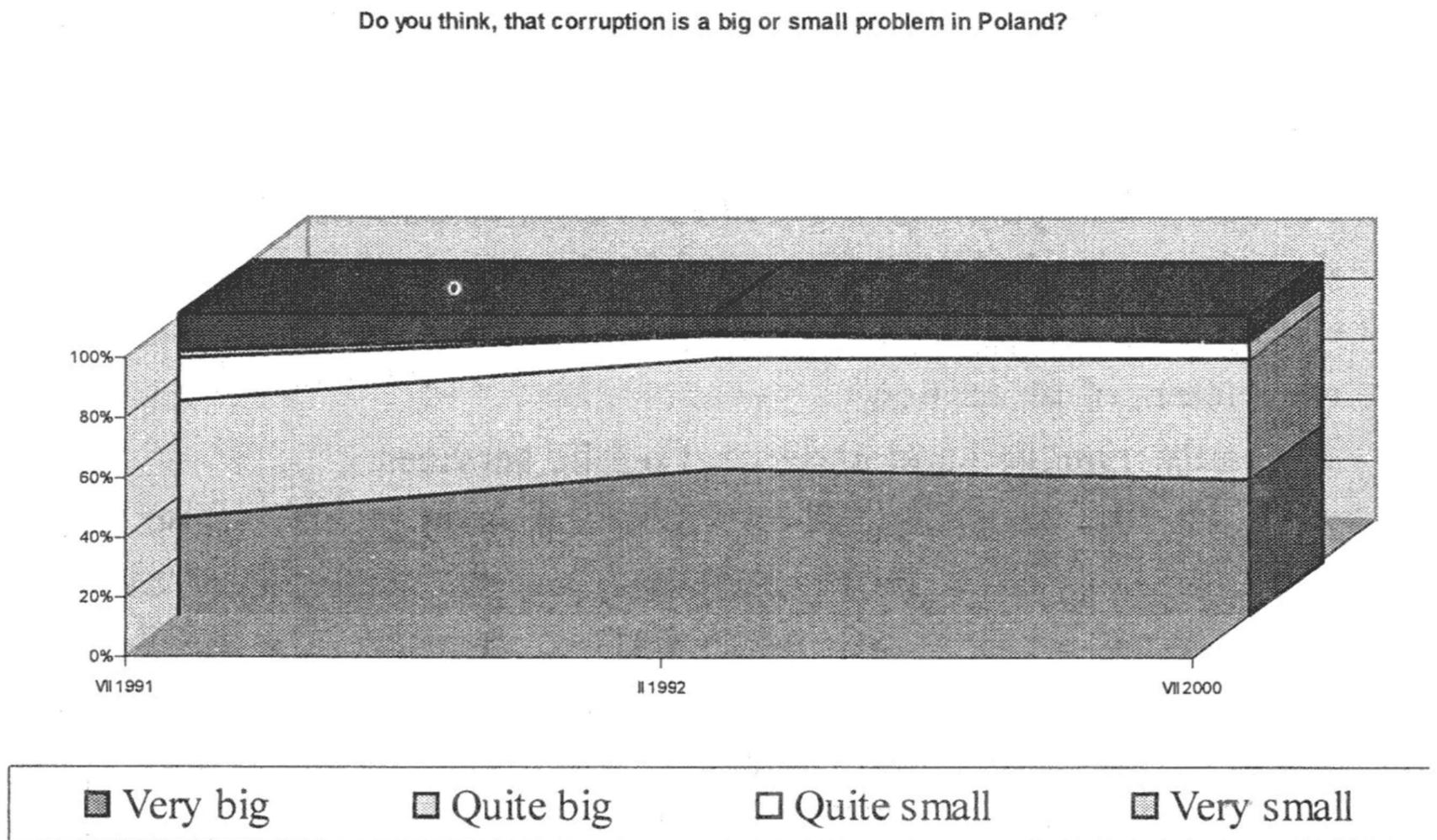
-badly managed and underpaid public services.

It is extremely difficult to assess the scale of corruption because of many reasons. First, most corruptive actions were never disclosed. Secondly, there are not any techniques to measure the level of this occurrence. There are only some techniques and standards which can give piecemeal results. It seems that for politicians more important than economic piecemeal results are statistics which were conducted among public opinion. However those statistics did not contain positive results. According to surveys of CBOS from September 2001 corruption is on the fourth place after financial situation of society, crimes and functioning of health service.

Public opinion in Poland emphasizes the role of corruption and politicians as the most corrupted class of society. Polish people believe that mostly politicians are responsible for the mess on economic and social bases.

³ Jasiocki K., 2001, Lobbing w Sejmie, w: Wesołowski W. (red.), Obciążeni polityką. Posłowie i partie, IFiS PAN, Warszawa

Graph 1. Perception of scale of corruption in Poland (in %).

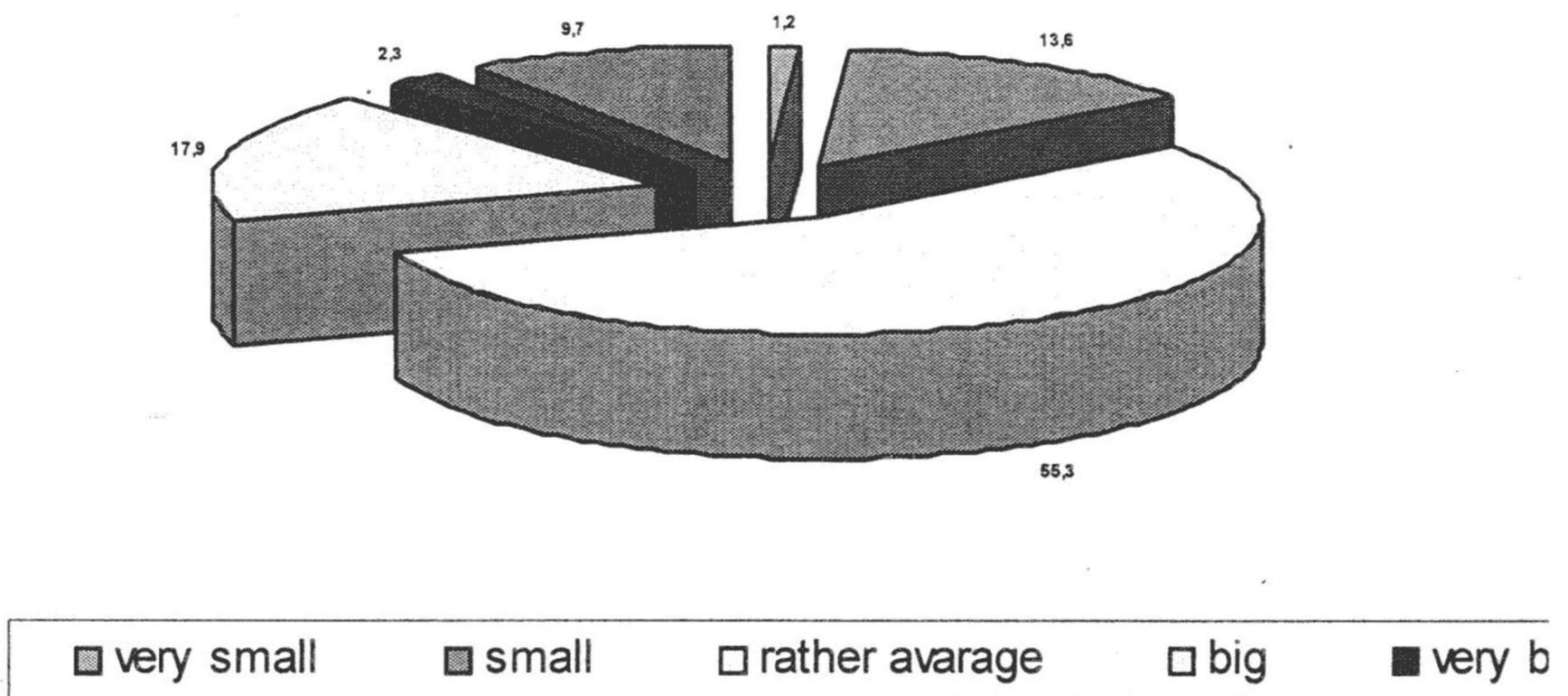


Source: M. Fałkowska, *Korupcja i łapownictwo w życiu publicznym*, CBOS, 2000, s. 4

The results of research from April 2002 confirmed the beliefs of public opinion. They showed that Polish people think that the most important problem of our economy is not the necessity of reducing the cost and increase of budget income or tax changes, but the limitation of corruption, reduction of bureaucracy and willful civil servants. 81% of responders are convinced of importance of the reducing the corruption.

International and European Security versus the Explosion of Global Media
Graph 2. Perception of scale of corruption in politician class (in %).

Do you think, that the scale of corruption of politicians is:



Source: K. Jasiński, *Lobbying w Sejmie*, 2001, s. 135

Research showed that society is convinced that corruption is a big problem and, what is worse, that it is increasing.

Responders think that corruption is mostly connected with civil servants and employing them on the most important or strategic positions. It is also common to employ on those posts family or friends.

However, most of the politicians think that the corruption among them is rather average according to the survey, which was conducted in government in 2000. Only every fifth politician emphasized the significant level of political corruption. About 15% of politicians recognized the corruption as small or even very small.

To reduce the level of this occurrence it is necessary to conduct reforms in administration, especially in the process of undertaking decision and of its transparency. Changes in law and its using are also needed. It is also important to take some actions in economic sphere through establishment institutions responsible for controlling the money and the way of spending public money.

It is impossible to eliminate the corruption completely. But it can be reduced, what depends on the whole society. It depends on us, if the techniques, which are used to fight corruption, are used or not.

Nowadays media have a great influence on us and their presence is seen in every aspect of our life. Media have also got the most influence on public opinion, creating politicians, advertising new products and styles and giving the illusion of fame.

The power of media is especially seen in creating the political scene. It often happens that media want to impose on us their opinion about this politician or party which they represents. It is easy to show somebody in disadvantage or to show not the whole utterance of somebody. The media have got big power which can be proved by disclosure of Watergate. Unfortunately there are also unpleasant events such as Lady Diana's death.

The affair disclosed by the media in Poland in recent times is the so called, Rywingate, where changes in the radio and television bill are offered to one of the press publishers. When Lew Rywin demanded the bribe from "Agora", wanted the sum of money on the account of his company - "Heritage Films". Now the ABW (Agency of National Security) is checking, if Lew Rywin's company could take part in such operations earlier. ABW is also checking the cash flows between collaborating companies which are "Canal+ Poland", "TVP S.A." and "Heritage Films". Adam Michnik, editor of "Gazeta Wyborcza" suggested that not everything is clear in those companies by saying: "We wanted to get into surveys which would tell something about transactions in Rywin's company - "Heritage Films". We wanted to do this, because Mr. Rywin suggested, the president of "Agora", Mrs. Wanda Rapaczyńska that it can be many swindlers there. We were curious, if it was like this with Public Television - Mr. Robert Kwiatkowski its president and Canal+". "Gazeta Wyborcza" did not confirm that. Some politicians are inspecting this case on their own.

It is possible to finance political campaign using the money, which was designated for film productions. It can be done by increasing the cost of production process, for example. The biggest production - the easiest increase of costs. If the politics was really financed by film productions, they are people as fellow - producers who know real costs and can reveal some facts about this case.

International and European Security versus the Explosion of Global Media

It is easy to take over money from film productions, because the only institution which can control them are Inland Revenue and the control of Public Television (if it gives money for film production).

In Rywingate "everyone is innocent, especially Lew Rywin". He did not want to testify. Also, the president of "TVP⁴", Mr. Robert Kwiatkowski, started his speech emphasizing his innocence. It was proved by Tomasz Nałęcz that Kwiatkowski in august 2002 knew the details of Rywingate. But in February 2003 Kwiatkowski said that he had known very little about Rywingate. Robert Kwiatkowski is convinced that the judge has to decide if he tells the truth or not. Kwiatkowski is only a witness, not a suspect.

Polish political scene is like the opera, where people sing different voices: "We are doing something, we are doing something". As they are singing, they do not move. They also sing: "We fight corruption". But it is only singing. The average elector is bored with this. When 80% of society believes, that Polish politicians are corrupted - they are especially angry with govern parties.

Experiences of HI RP shows, that the new or faster election would not change anything. In Italy, after revealing the scale of corruption, it was decided to lead in electoral law and majority. But in Poland this change would be more difficult as it is against the Constitution.

On the Polish political scene we can see some changes in parties and people, but the main actors and their duties remain the same. Politicians, which are in opposition, are with those poor and wick people, but the govern party is trying to explain, that the budget would not let them deliver their promises. Changing the place on the political scene means only changing the point of view and because of this most Polish people would not like to take part in the elections. And because of this (probably) in the survey of "Wprost" from March 2003, for the question: "Is it necessary to disband the government?" most of the responders (52,2%) answered no. If people understood the advantages of electoral law and majority, they should do everything to conduct election earlier, as it was in the USA, Germany or Italy.

Rywingate has the most influence on the President of Poland, Prime Minister and their party, "SLD". Every day of interrogation brings

⁴ TVP - Polish Public Television

something new. Polish people do not treat Rywingate as a single case, but they begin to believe, that it is the common style of politicians.

Also another party - "Samobrona" has got many problems last time. This party is not associated with Rywingate, but people do not want to support it any more, mainly because of its indecision connected with the European Union. Their protests did not improve anything. People prefer to support "Liga Polskich Rodzin".

In the best situation are only those politicians of "SLD", who are not associated with Rywingate as: Jozef Oleksy, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Marek Borowski. It does not mean that they are going to be new leaders.

The fact that people are bored with all politicians is seen in increasing showing Jolanta Kwasniewska. But it is only a demonstration, because during the elections people would not change their mind. Jolanta Kwasniewska was not and would not be a politician. In campaign you cannot say only about family, animals, charity or love. People would not vote on somebody like this. But the most important change can be seen in votes for Polish Prime Minister - Leszek Miller, who probably would not have any chances in next election. Some years ago it was hard to believe that left wing would not have a leader, but it is like this nowadays.

During interrogation, the Member of Parliament - Zbigniew Ziobro (PiS) was interested in connections between "TVP" and another company "Euromedia TV". In "Euromedia TV" board there had been Włodzimierz Czarzasty (secretary of "KRRiTV") until 1998. Publisher "Muza", where its stakes has got Włodzimierz Czarzasty, has got nearly 30% shares of "Euromedia TV", in Wanda Rapaczynska's opinion, leaders of new act about television and radiophony wanted to create a new media concern (after a privatization of "TVP 2" (channel 2 of public television)) by weaken the private media. This concern would consist of public television, "Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne (another public publisher) and maybe also the most popular newspapers.

It was also established "anti-Agora" association. Włodzimierz Czarzasty and Robert Kwiatkowski are the most important people in this association, which has more than 3000 members as: Marek Siwiec, Wiesław Kaczmarek, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Jozef Oleksy, Danuta Waniek. When Lew Rywin said about the group which holds power, it seems that this group is not something contrived.

International and European Security versus the Explosion of Global Media

Rywingate shows Poland of which we are ashamed. Parties, which take decision among them and which divide among them the control of money and public life. It is like mafia and political office together.

The Elector, who just voted his candidate must feel like a fool. The only thing, which country can give you is increasing taxes for example.

What can think citizen about its country, when all the politicians are lying all the time. Interrogation and all testimonies in front of investigation commission are one big lie. People, who are testifying often forget, that they are under oath, which means that they often break the law - act 233 of penal code. The worst fact of the whole case is that also the President of Poland is associated with Rywingate. It was hard to hide this fact. Winston Churchill was always saying that a person who does not know how to lie could not be a politician, but he was also saying that it could not also be a person, who was found out on it.

Rywingate is not the only case in Poland. At the beginning of July 2003, a Polish newspaper - "Rzeczpospolita" wrote that the police discovered another case, in which were involved Polish politicians. The newspaper wrote that the Member of Parliament - Andrzej Jagiełło warned foremen from Starachowice (who belongs to the same party - "SLD") about the action which was planned by CBS (Central Bureau of Investigation), because the foremen was suspected of cooperation with mafia. The police has got a proof, which are recorded tapes. Jagiełło said, that Zbigniew Sobotka, vice president of MSWiA told him about everything. General Antoni Kowalczyk told about his "discover" Vice Minister Sobotka, who told about everything the President of MSWiA Krzysztof Janik. Later all materials were left in Public Prosecutor's Office in Kielce. 25th April the secret investigation was begun.

Minister Z. Sobotka denied that he had said something about the action of CBS. He claims that he even did not know about it, because such details of such operations are always top secret. On 30th March 2003 policemen halted in Starachowice members of local government (Mieczysław Sławek and Marek Basiak), the boss of local gang - Leszek Skuza and his group - 18 people at all. They were all charged of selling weapon, explosive materials and drugs. Mieczysław Sławek and Marek

Basiak (members of local government) were not members of the gang, but they used it for their interests. They are arrested.

In this case most information was found by interceptions. It was recorded, that Andrzej Jagiełło ("SLD") phoned his friend from the same party - Mieczysław Sławek and told him about the action of CBS. He also said that he knew about everything from minister Sobotka, but Sobotka said that he was innocent and he did not say anything to anyone.

Foreman Mieczysław Sławek is accused of cheating about 28,4 thousand zł from insurance company and Marek Basiak of cheating 3,3 thousand zł and because of his bribes (2,5 thousand zł), which were given to the president of health commission in Starachowice. The police thinks, that Leszek Skuza (the boss of the local gang) helped both politicians. Mieczysław Sławek and Marek Basiak were arrested from 26th March 2003 until 17th November 2003. Marek Basiak confessed to all charges. Foreman still persists that he is innocent.

When we look into this case properly, it is getting more interesting than at the beginning. The collaboration in Starachowice began with the fall of the factory "Star" - the biggest employer in the city. "Star" was employing about 20 thousand people. It was giving earnings, flats, kindergartens, entertainment, sport and the feeling of proud, that lorries from Starachowice were known from Paris till Dakar. Later everything changed, the production dropped, the factory began to reduce employees and employees began to strike. The city and the government did not have any idea to solve this problem.

Left wing has governed in Starachowice since 1994. Zenon Krzeszowski, who is the first left wing president, said that during his term of office the unemployment fell. Krzeszowski was accused of abusing his control.

Krzeszowski helped Jagiełło and gave him the post of the president of Local Center of Public Health - said Maksalon. Maksalon remembers Jagiełło when they were at the same party - "PZPR". Jagiełło had problems in this party. Also Krzeszowski helped Marek Basiak and gave him the post of Local Center of Entertainment and Relax. This center was one of the best employers in the city. Basiak was a member of "SdRP", later of "SLD" and finally he became the Chairman of Local Council in Starachowice. Mieczysław Sławek thanks to friend Krzeszowski became the president of Job Office. But he started his career

International and European Security versus the Explosion of Global Media
as local secretary of "PZPR" in Pawłowo and finished it as the Chairman of Local Council of "SLD". Krzeszowski also helped current president of the city - Sylwester Kwiecień. In this period Leszek Skuza won an adjudication for a local parking area. Former president said, that he did not know Skuza. He only knew that Skuza's father had a car service.

Basiak and Skuza were friends. From 10 year so from the time, when Basiak was the director of Center their contacts were closer. Gossips about Leszek were known by everyone in the city - said Basiak. But nobody cared about those gossips. Everyone knew about their parties at the swimming pool. Skuza was known as a person who could deal with everything.

Jagiełło took advantage of his chance and started to build his own system. He registered his subjected employees to "SLD" party. His employees did not refuse. In Starachowice it is hard to find any job, so the employee has got a control and he can make demands. Jagiełło had control, because he was an employer. His group was called "Jagiełło's soldiers". The main conditions were: work, membership in "SLD" and loyalty. Thanks to his soldiers he got rid off Krzeszowski, who lost his post in "SLD". Basiak sided with Jagiełło and, because of this, he became the Chairperson of Local Council of "SLD". The Chairperson of Local Council became Sławek and Jagiełło was the president of the party in the administrative district.

Before election to Parliament, Jagiełło concluded with the most important rival - Kwiecień. Jagiełło promised him the post of president of the city, if he resigned from election to Parliament The election campaign was controlled by Basiak. Thanks to Jagiełło's soldiers the president of "SLD" in Kielce became Henryk Długosz. Jagiełło was controlling the votes after election and everything was known before - reminds senator Jerzy Suchanski, the rival of Długosz. "Jagiełło is a coward and he does not play fair. He eliminates who he wants. When you cross, you are finished. He uses methods of intimidation" - that was written in letters from Starachowice to "SLD".

The most important were the elections to the local government. Eight members of "SLD" were in the local government and one of them became a president. Also Basiak reached a very good result, but he did not become a foreman, because of the case with cheated votes. It was discovered, that "SLD" bought votes. In area Bugaj, where the candidate

was Basiak, the attendance reached 80% after opening the elections. If you had voted Basiak, you received one bottle of vodka. People said that the control of everything had Skuza. In another area the control had another person, what was discovered after the protests of six election committees. The whole case landed up in Public Prosecutor's Office in Kielce. The foreman became Sławek. Basiak only got the post of Vice Chairman of the Council.

What business can you do in the city, where unemployment reached 31%? The local Chambers are going to control all tenders. There people are ready to do all things to get a job. There people are abused, because of their desperation and poverty - thinks Krzeszowski, who left his former party - "SLD".

Jagiello's wife was first who got the job, later his friend - Jeremiasz Stefanik became a director of "MOPS". The winner of the elections took everything. After Basiak leaving, Kwiecień employed, without competition, his brother-in-law as a director of Sport Center - says Cezary Berak.

CBS was interested in local gangs in 2001. Maybe because, through this area runs, well known, way of smuggling drugs. One year later the interceptions were installed. It was recorded a conversation between foreman and Skuza. The foreman asked him about stealing his car. The theft was reported to the police by foreman and in insurance in "Warta". The director of "Warta" and foreman were friends. The car was insured for 35 thousand zł, but "Warta" paid him about 30 thousand zł.

Also Basiak was recorded when he asked Skuza to provoke a car crash to get the money from insurance. I asked Skuza about car crash, but I did not take part in it. It was done by my employees. I only went to the insurance company to take money - admitted Basiak. He added that everything was arranged with one of the policeman and the director of insurance company "Polonia", where the car was insured. He also said, that he had helped Skuza only one time, when he fixed his friends up with release from army. I helped a lot of people, because it is my role as a politician. I also tried to employ people, because I know that there are many problems with finding job - he assured.

On 26th March 2003 CBS halted 18 members of Starachowice gang. Among arrested there were also the foreman Sławek and Basiak. It is said that they had cooperated with local gang, but in the indictment they

International and European Security versus the Explosion of Global Media
were not accused of this. The foreman was accused of cheating the insurance company "Warta" and Basiak was accused of nearly the same thing.

Both were arrested. The Local Court in Kielce did not adopt the motion about probation. The court recognized their crimes as important ones.

In April, the Member of Parliament - Jagiełło wanted to visit them in the prison, because "they are from the same party". The public prosecutor did not let Jagiełło to do it, because it was known, that Jagiełło phoned on 26th March to the foreman Sławek and told him about the action of CBS.

Politicians and civil servants are also being looked and they are under more strict law and regulations. All suspicions must be explained very quickly and the public opinion should be informed about everything. It is normal in every country, that you can hear about swindles or corruptive propositions. It is mainly because of the fact that people who govern want to enrich as quickly as possible. However, it is important to speak about such cases. The media has an important role in this process, because they inform and discover new facts.

Freedom in the state is characterized not only by civil rights but also by freedom of thought, speech and print. Montesquieu stated in 17th century that freedom is guaranteed by a state where executive, legislative and judiciary powers are separate. Such division of power is the base of constitutionalism and is relevant up to date. The French thinker didn't take media as the 4th power into account. The public opinion is based on the commentaries "attached" to reports about government actions. The journalist should be as objective as possible when presenting the politicians picture. Their commentaries are of great importance to the public.

The freedom of speech doesn't mean that journalists can deliver any statement they wish. According to Polish medial law, journalists who put curiosity and affairs on the first place can be taken to court.

As shown before the mass media can be called the 4th power, whose role is to delight or shock the mass - receiver to gain certain effects. It is difficult to await any changes in times when mass - culture can be seen everywhere. All actions have only one aim - to interest as many people as possible.

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