

DOI: 10.51480/1899-5101.15.1(30).4

Politicizing Poland's Public Service Media: The Analysis of *Wiadomości* News Program

Katarzyna Gajlewicz-Korab ORCID: 0000-0002-4900-2854

University of Warsaw, Poland

Łukasz Szurmiński ORCID: 0000-0002-2918-6502

University of Warsaw, Poland

Abstract: This study explores the tensions between the mission and pluralism of the media versus the participation of the public service media (PSM) in government propaganda in Poland. We present the results of the hybrid qualitative-quantitative content analysis of the propaganda techniques used in *Wiadomości* – the main public TVP1 news program. Two weekly blocks of news were analyzed. The first was randomly selected from 2015-2020. The second was subsequently chosen for the same seven days, two years later. We assumed that this chronological difference would reveal changes in narration and propaganda used in the news. The analysis refers to the mission of PSM, as defined by the law in the Broadcasting Act (1992). The changes that occurred after 2015 were also the result of new legal regulations and personnel changes. The conclusions confirm that the news from the PSM is controlled and manipulated by the government.

Keywords: Polish media; public service media; politicization, propaganda techniques; *Wiadomości* news program.

INTRODUCTION

The media system in Poland has always been closely related to the state, which made it difficult for journalists to be impartial. Lucyna Szot says that in Poland the media became a tool of political parties: “There is an abyss between the ideas of a neutral, impartial observer and practice deeply rooted in the tradition of biased, engaged journalism”¹ (Szot, 2020, p. 169). Public service media (PSM)

1 All translations of Polish texts into English are the responsibility of the authors of this article.

in Poland have been treated as a kind of political target by the ruling party since the beginning of the political transformation. Poland's Broadcasting Act (1992) enacted on 1 March 1993 assumed politicians' influence on filling the main posts in public radio and television (Mielczarek, 2007). Politicization has been apparent not only in institutional but also in staff or program spheres. Each ruling party aimed to dominate the Polish PSM. However, changes made by *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS, Law and Justice) after winning the parliamentary elections in 2015 were so substantive that Poland has since become an object of interest at the international level. The changes made by PiS worsened the situation of the country not only according to EU politicians, but also in various studies, rankings, and reports (showing Poland departing from democratization processes).

Studies on media in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries initially referred to the authoritarian model that Siebert et al. (1956) describe in their book "Four Theories of the Press". Since 2004, scholars analyzing media systems in the CEE consider the criteria devised by Hallin and Mancini (2004). At the beginning of the democratization process, European countries had much in common with the polarized pluralist model. In line with their development, the attributes of the liberal model have improved, for instance, in Poland. Referring to previous studies, Dobek-Ostrowska (2015) offers the concept of division of the media system in this region and classifies Poland (together with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia) as the liberal hybrid model. She emphasizes that, compared to other countries, Poland's media market is relatively large and that the media are more pluralistic and competition-oriented.

THEORY AND CONTEXT

In the early 2000s, Poland's media system displayed the characteristics of a liberal model with polarized pluralism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska (2010) argues that over the ensuing decade Poland's media system not only features strong political parallelism, a high level of state intervention, as well as media tabloidization and commercialization, but also deep politicization, partiality, and engagement in the political process. The outcome of Dobek-Ostrowska's research into the Polish media system (2015, 2019) is that the most suitable model for Poland is a liberal hybrid model. Other researchers have focused on the high politicization of Poland's PSM (Brüggemann et al., 2014; Wąsińska, 2014; Węglińska, 2018).

Political parallelism is the key concept for this topic in the context of Poland's media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Coined by Seymour-Ure (1974) and developed by Blumler and Gurevitch (1995), political parallelism gained popularity in 2000 when Hallin and Mancini (2004) included the concept as one

of the four analytical variables of comparative media systems. In the context of increased political parallelism, relations between journalists and political actors are very close, impacting on journalists' work. Additionally, as Dragomir (2005) argues, public media are more exposed to political pressure than privately owned ones. Political parallelism is more prevalent in post-Communist countries than any of the EU's stable democracies, as revealed by Freedom House between 1993 and 2012 (Bajomi-Lázár, 2015).

Lucyna Szot (2020) suggests that media-politics relations have always been conflicting. Changes in the nation's politics influenced the reorganization of PSM structures in Poland, consolidating the process of media politicization. Ryszard Herbut (2002) notes that politicians performing functions in PSM are a manifestation of this process, perceived as the colonization of public administration. Indeed, Oniszczyk (2011, p. 18) argues that politicization means determining the influence of the politicians on media, and the subordination of media to politics. However, as several researchers have found, politicization is multidimensional (see Bennett et al., 2007; Boykoff & Boykoff, 2007; Feldman et al., 2017). In the context of Poland's PSM, Jaskiernia and Pokorna-Ignatowicz (2018) contend that, despite the efforts of various communities, PSM have yet to be separated from politics, and Donders (2021, p. 273) suggests that Poland might be falling back into the abyss of State broadcasting.

The political party *Platforma Obywatelska* (PO, Civic Platform) won the parliamentary elections in 2007 and formed a coalition government together with *Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe* (PSL, Polish People's Party) with Donald Tusk as Prime Minister. The next parliamentary election took place in 2011, at which time the governing party (the coalition) held on to its power for the first time since 1989. These elections took place in an atmosphere of increasing social polarization, related to the aircraft catastrophe in 2010, in which the President of Poland, his entourage and more than 90 politicians, generals, clergymen, and families of people murdered in Katyń during World War II, all died. The next election took place in 2015, won by *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS, Law and Justice), which repeated its electoral success in 2019. After 2015, PiS took control of PSM and began to use them as a tool of political propaganda, which suggests that Donders's (2021) fears of Poland falling into an abyss are legitimate.

PUBLIC SERVICE MEDIA IN POLAND

The frequently cited World Press Freedom Index of the Reporters Without Borders shows that freedom of speech has been gradually restricted in Poland. The main criteria that define the positions of nations in the ranking are related to the level and character of the relationship between media and politics. Poland

in 2020 ranked 62nd out of 180 classified countries, close to states such as Georgia, Armenia, and Argentina (Reporters Without Borders, 2020). Yet only five years earlier, in 2015, Poland was ranked 18th.

Justifying Poland's rank in the 2020 report, RSF points out that the decline was due to the growing criminalization of sanctions against the press in cases of defamation, hate speech broadcast in PSM, which was also utilized by the government as a propaganda tool, and the intolerance displayed by the heads of PSM for journalists wanting to stay neutral (Reporters Without Borders, 2020). The same index for 2017 stated that the new Broadcasting Act of 30 December 2015 "transformed PSM into state ones, and the heads of TV channels were rapidly replaced by people connected to the ruling party" (Dopierała & Ossowski, 2018, p. 6).

Freedom House (2020) also mentions the decline of democratization processes in Poland. In 2020, Freedom House evaluated Poland as 4.93 on a scale of 0-7 (and was thus classified as a semi-consolidated democracy). Yet just five years earlier, in 2015, the evaluation was 5.79 (a consolidated democracy). Numerous features responsible for the worsening situation in Poland are mentioned in the Freedom House (2020) report, like attacks on the LGBT+ community, extremism in public discourse, charges for local government budgets, and disciplinary systems applied to intimidate judges critical of the government's revision of the judiciary system. The report pays particular attention to the deteriorating situation of commercial media, which after the government took control of public broadcasters were next in line to have their autonomy restricted. The PSM continue to distribute propaganda content, promoting a positive one-sided image of the governing coalition. The report also criticizes budgeted financing for these broadcasters, which amounts to PLN2 billion. Freedom House (2020) evaluated the health of media as 5 on a 7-grade scale, down from 5.50 in 2015.

Inconsistencies in governmental financial support are notable. Broadcasting revenue and television subscriptions should be sufficient to finance TVP because the Polish media model assumes that a PSM can broadcast advertisements. However, various socio-demographic groups are exempt from having a TV subscription such as seniors aged 75 years and older, the unemployed, beneficiaries of care allowances, the deaf and the blind. Furthermore, because television subscriptions have a poor rate of collection (estimated at 31% of all viewers obliged to pay in 2018) (Owruszko (2019), PiS as the ruling party decided that the state would compensate public media losses. As media scholars in Poland have noted, the sum of compensation for all PSM was almost doubled over the next three years from PLN980 million in 2018 to PLN1.95 billion in 2021.

Kucharski (2019) suggests that the increase proves the lack of defined rules for this support, the abstractness of the amount, and that it is a hidden form of support for the propaganda tool of the governing party. The symptoms of the

negative situation of the Polish PSM include not only restrictions of their autonomy, but also the level of public trust in them. The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism surveyed trust in the main media brands in Poland in 2020 and found that trust in TVP Info (public news channel and portal) amounts to only 43%, and 39% of the respondents do not trust it at all (Reuters Institute, 2020). Two commercial channels are its main competitors, Polsat News with a trust level of 65%, and TVN24 – 63% (Reuters Institute, 2020). Importantly, TVP Info as a news channel has a weekly audience of 31%, while the competitive TVN News (TVN24 + TVNBis) have 50%. The report also states that independent media usually receive more trust than TVP, as the public broadcaster is often perceived as acting in the interest of the ruling party (Reuters Institute, 2020).

The changes mentioned above are mainly the result of the new political course, initiated after the parliamentary election in 2015, in which the conservative PiS took control of government. The PiS party is led by Jarosław Kaczyński, whom Zamana (2016) describes as an uncompromising populist politician focused on autocracy. Immediately after winning the parliamentary election in October 2015, the PiS-led government brought in a ‘small amendment’ to the 1992 Broadcasting Act, which allowed the party to take control of Poland’s PSM before the end of the Board’s fixed 6-year term. The primary controversial aspect of the ‘small amendment’ was that the competition for being a member of the PSM’s Board, open to members of the public, was discontinued. The Minister of the Treasury was given the power to make the appointments. The second controversy was that the ‘small amendment’ abolished the fixed term (6-year) appointments of the members of the management board. Miżejewski (2018) explains that the amendment also provided the termination of the mandates of members of the supervisory and management boards of PSM, i.e., Polskie Radio S.A. (Polish Radio) and TVP S.A. on the effective date of the Act, and Miżejewski emphasizes that the Act gave the Minister of Treasury a lot of discretion and that the appointment of media authorities was no longer collegiate. Another significant change was the approval by Parliament on 29 June 2016 of the Act that created a new National Media Council, which took over the Minister of Treasury’s powers of appointing members of the PSM management board. This legislative technique was necessary for two reasons. First, at the time the PiS party gained power in December 2015, the 6-year terms of office of the collegiately elected management boards of the PSM and the Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji (KRRiT, National Broadcasting Council) would be effective throughout the government’s term of office. Secondly, PiS could not interfere with the competencies of KRRiT’s board as it is a constitutional body, and PiS did not have the majority of votes in the Parliament the party needed to change the constitution. These new regulations allowed the PSM’s politicization to develop in an unprecedented way for the first time since 1989.

It is worth noting that TVP S.A. is one of the three largest players in Poland's digital terrestrial television market. It dominates the audience alongside two commercial broadcasters: Polsat TV (Cyfrowy Polsat, Digital Polsat) and US owned TVN (Discovery). An extensive range of thematic channels and an extensive TV archive, developed over 70 years, give TVP a strong position in Poland's TV market.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is to explore the increasing politicization of *Wiadomości*, the main public TV news program (TVP), during the rule of *Zjednoczona Prawica* (ZP, United Political Right), led by the *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS) party in Poland. Media politicization is defined firstly as an attempt by political forces to dominate media and the usage of media for the realization of own, specifically partisan goals (Oniszczyk, 2011, p. 18). Propaganda and persuasion are the tools of such politicization, used in either language or content organization and presentation. Other appearances or features of media politicization include open entry and activity of politics (in all its manifestations and types) in the everyday life of mass media (Adamowski, 2001, p. 67), as well as the active participation of the media in political life, through the order of the topics presented, selection of the interviewees, and the way the topics are presented (Dopierała & Ossowski, 2018, p. 7). Antonio Ciaglia (2013) argues in his comparative studies that media and political systems are always interdependent, although these relations can differ in forms and scale.

The broadcaster that is the subject of this research has a public status, therefore, it is obliged by the Broadcasting Act to enable "the citizens and their organizations to participate in public life by presenting different views and opinions and exercising the right of control and social critique" (art. 21, pass. 2 point 4 of the Broadcasting Act (1992)). The politicization of the content broadcast in TVP1 *Wiadomości* disrupts this process. The research findings discussed below present the main features of the content transmitted by the news program, potentially influencing public opinion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

We formulated four research questions within the scope of the study:

- Q1: Are there any changes in the level of politicization of the news program *Wiadomości* between 2019 and 2021?
- Q2: If so, what is the character of these changes?
- Q3: What influenced the changes?

- Q4: Were any propaganda techniques applied?

Concerning these research questions, we composed four hypotheses:

- H1: The main hypothesis states that *Wiadomości* as the main TVP news program does not meet one of the crucial tasks of a public broadcaster, i.e., the realization of the duty of objectivity and impartiality, but rather it is increasing the politicization of its broadcast news.
- H2: News items broadcast in *Wiadomości* create a positive image of *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* and the government.
- H3: The tone of *Wiadomości*'s news is closely and positively related to the daily news of the *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* party.
- H4: *Wiadomości* contributes to polarization and divisions in society.

METHODOLOGY

The research methods applied in this project are quantitative and qualitative content analysis, supported by contextual analysis. Quantitative content analysis aimed at providing a quantitative description of explicit content communicated through the analyzed material (see Berelson, 1952, p. 18), such as the frequency of appearance of main actors and key features in the analyzed news. Data were coded by two researchers and the average intercoder agreement, measured by Cohen's kappa, was 0.97. Qualitative content analysis (Silverman, 2011) aimed at exploring how language is used to promote persuasion or propaganda techniques. Contextual analysis supported the content analysis, by allowing to validate the findings through external sources, such as expert reports and academic literature.

For the purposes of the study, we developed a classification key according to criteria suggested by Walery Pisarek and based on the research method of Bernard Berelson (Pisarek, 1983, p. 103), which was applied to every one of the smallest constitutive units of a news program, i.e., a news item (Seklecka, 2017). Any study attempting to identify increases in the politicization of news requires a comparative analysis of the selected resource materials spread over time (see Klepka, 2018; Nowak-Teter, 2021; Seklecka, 2017). We chose to analyze daily news programs occurring in the same calendric week—4-10 February—of two distinct years, for which the initial choices were 2019 and 2016. The latter would have been relevant because the concept of the program under the new TVP Director was being developed at that time and the process of staff purges was just gaining momentum. Unfortunately, the official request of the authorities of the Faculty of Journalism, Information and Book Studies, at the University of Warsaw, for the release of archival *Wiadomości* programs from Feb 4-10 2016,

remained unanswered despite repeated appeals. Consequently, we chose 2021. Both samples consist of seven consecutive daily broadcasts of *Wiadomości*. During each week, there was the same number of news items (n=71) making an aggregate for the two weeks (N=142).

A comparative analysis of two research sample periods enabled us not only to identify the characteristics of politicization in *Wiadomości*, the main news program of the PSM, but also if politicization is stable or intensifying.

Notably, *Wiadomości* has been the leader in audience figures of news programs. There has been, since 2018, intense competition between *Wiadomości* and the independent broadcaster *Fakty TVN* (Wirtualnedia, 2018). In 2019, *Wiadomości* attracted 14.57% of the audience, but *Fakty* led with 22.69% (Wirtualnedia, 2021). Although the figures for *Wiadomości* increased in 2021 to 21.16%, *Fakty* was still the leader with 22.58% (Wirtualnedia, 2021).

The study collected the following data: release date, order of news, identity of the news presenter, content of the news ticker, the main – and second-order topics of the analyzed news, people presented in the news (journalist, expert, pundit, civil servant), and graphic materials supporting narration (infographics, diagrams, tables). Additionally, we applied, through qualitative content analysis, language analysis regarding persuasion or propaganda techniques used in the material. The study included contextual analysis, supported by additional literature and expert reports, aiming to relate the findings with the identified levels of politicization and political parallelism between politics and media, in Poland.

FINDINGS

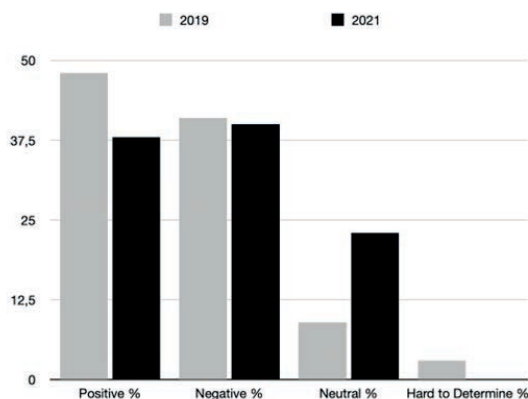
MEDIA SUPPORT FOR THE GOVERNMENT

The first group of identified issues consists of the content and forms that directly support the government. The first is the tone of the *Wiadomości* news items. The analysis of the material from the two periods did not reveal any significant discrepancies (see Figure 1) other than the rise of neutral tone news items.

The analysis reveals that the increase of neutral tone news was the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, which required the broadcaster to publish informational content. Three types of neutral information were determined for the 2021 period. The first (n=3) was of a commemorative character, related to the deaths of public figures, such as the outstanding Polish actor Krzysztof Kowalewski and the cartoonist Henryk Chmielewski (alias Papić Chmiel). The second (n=3) was focused on the immunization of various social groups (teachers – at the time). However, there were quite a lot of news items concerning this topic, and most of them, despite their neutral character, had a slightly negative or positive tone.

The third type (n=16) did not refer to the pandemic, but to the wintry conditions, international topics and other issues broadcast during 4-10 February 2021.

Figure 1. Comparison of the tone of the news items on *Wiadomości* during February 4-10 in 2019 and 2021



Source: Authors

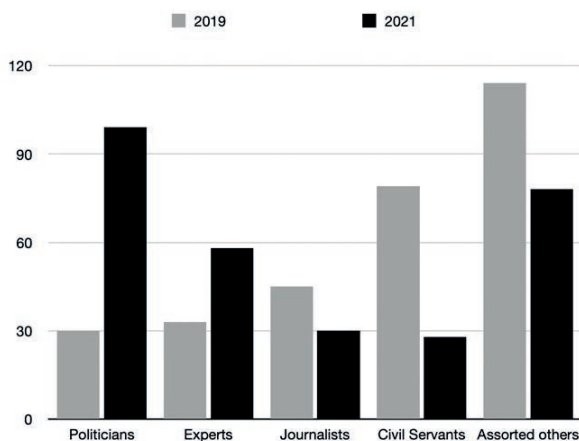
Context was an important element in evaluating the credibility and reliability of *Wiadomości*. Almost all the positive news items mentioned the activities of the Polish government, individual ministries, and the Polish President. By contrast, the critical news items referred to activities of the Polish opposition and institutions of the European Union (EU Commission, European Parliament), as well as a few member states (France, Germany). The bias of TVP1 and *Wiadomości* was proved in the letter of Ombudsman Adam Bodnar (Bodnar, 2020) sent on 6.5.2020 to Witold Kołodziejcki, President of the KRRiT, which oversees the electronic media market in the Polish legal system. The letter asked KRRiT to investigate a violation by the PSM of the 1992 Act on Broadcasting and Television. The Act obliges the PSM to carry out the mission of developing programs characterized by pluralism, impartiality, balance, and independence (Bodnar, 2020). The contextual analysis confirmed Hypothesis 2 concerning the promotion of the positive image of the Polish government and the PiS politicians.

Another element that was analyzed was the issue of people appearing in the news as pundits, in 2019 (n=301) and in 2021 (n=293) (see Figure 2).

The large number of 'Assorted others' is particularly noticeable, which results from the TVP production staff using the 'plain folks' technique, i.e., reference to opinions of the so-called ordinary citizens, who were mostly interviewed during street polls. The decrease of their number in 2021 is connected to the special circumstances during the pandemic, which required more consultations with health experts or politicians. However, the lack of information on the number

of people surveyed and of the distribution of their opinion, clearly proved the manipulative character of this method.

Figure 2. Pundits (by profession and number) invited to appear on *Wiadomości* during 4-10, February in 2019 and 2021



Source: Authors

The increased number of politicians and experts in the news for this period was mainly related to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to inform society about the situation and new restrictions. However, crises invariably have a significant influence on the image of politicians, either negatively or positively. Regarding the broad convergence between the positive tone and the increased presence of PiS politicians in the news, it is clear that *Wiadomości* ensured that the pandemic benefitted the ruling party. As Włodarczyk points out, the pandemic threat became an element of the political game:

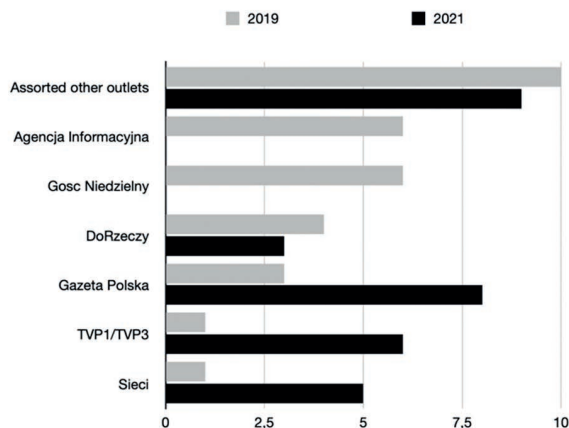
insofar as activities of the government at the beginning of the pandemic could have been perceived as information management, subsequent communications downplaying the threat or its resolution should rather be perceived as manipulation: due to short-term political interest, efforts were made to minimize the threat. (Włodarczyk, 2020, p. 140)

The pandemic situation complicated the search to find out whether the increase in the appearance of politicians in the news, compared to 2019, was only due to their greater activity. Another reason was radicalization of the political course because the PiS party had requested, in December 2019, the subordinated Constitutional Tribunal to tighten the abortion law in Poland. Zuzanna Dąbrowska (2021) argues that this was the main reason of the rapid fall in the PiS party ratings. The diminished presence of journalists and civil

servants in 2021 may also be connected to the pandemics, and to the increased visibility of politicians and experts in the limited duration of the news programs.

Another identified issue was the presence of journalists acting as pundits in the TVP news program. Interestingly, in each period the pundit-journalists appeared on 31 occasions. There were no significant differences amongst the represented outlets (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Journalists (by outlet) acting as invited pundits on *Wiadomości*, during February 4-10 in 2019 and 2021



Source: Authors

Pundit-journalists in 2019 mostly represented outlets that sympathized with the authorities (n=21). The ‘assorted other outlets’ category consists of specialized media with narrow focuses (e.g., the military journal *Polska Zbrojna* and the sports review paper *Przegląd Sportowy*). Their pundits mostly had a neutral tone. Only 1 of the 31 journalists criticized the Polish government.

The situation was similar in the second period, with pundit-journalists representing outlets that supported the authorities (n=22). None of the aggregate (n=31) were critical of the government. The ‘assorted other outlets’ category included branch media (*energetyka24.pl*) or those favorable toward the government, but which appeared only once (e.g., *Gazeta Bankowa*, *Gazeta Gdańska*, and the Catholic weekly news magazine *Gość Niedzielny*).

There was a significant disproportion in the representation of different views and the overwhelming dominance of pro-government attitudes among politicians and journalists in *Wiadomości*. Qualitative analysis of the news revealed that journalists often act as experts whose task should be limited to a short description of an event (facts, contexts, statements of other people). On the contrary, they accepted the role of pundits and interpreters, even though they were not

sufficiently competent. Additionally, this politicization was due to most of the invited journalists being associated to outlets, which supported the PiS government.

CRITICISM OF ENTITIES OPPOSING THE GOVERNMENT

The second group of identified issues consisted of the content and forms that directly criticized the government and PiS, and entities that were clearly not political, i.e., they did not belong to the opposition. This category includes any of the European Union institutions (e.g., the EU Commission) or media or public figures (e.g., journalists).

The qualitative analysis revealed that *Wiadomości* actively participated in a dichotomous perception of the European Union and the negation of its politics by the broadcaster. The critiques of EU politicians, as well as leaders of the largest member states (Germany and France), seems to be a permanent element of the policy of the news program. The negative tone in the news does not result from complex persuasion tools or methods, but from the explicit inclusion of evaluative statements of error and blame, such as the following: “[The] EU finally understood that it made a mistake forcing a pro-immigration policy” (02.10.21); “The EU Commission did not care for the timely arrival of the vaccines” (07.02.21). The negative tone was multiplied by the lack of comments from the EU representatives. Public opinion surveys carried out by CBOS (the government-dependent public opinion research center) in 2018 researched the social attitudes towards the PiS party² in the context of EU integration. According to the poll’s results, PiS sought to suppress rather than strengthen EU integration, which meant that PiS aimed to limit integration and increase the role of national states in the EU (27% of respondents) or to maintain the status quo (25%) (CBOS, 2018). Furthermore, some of the respondents perceived the ruling party as pursuing Pol-exit (16%). Only a few respondents (3%) thought that PiS wanted to create a multi-speed Europe, where select states cooperate more closely than others (CBOS, 2018). The social awareness of the PiS party’s reluctant perception to the EU was common. The distribution of anti-EU commentaries in TVP1 was perceived not only by public opinion but also in the result of the content analysis.

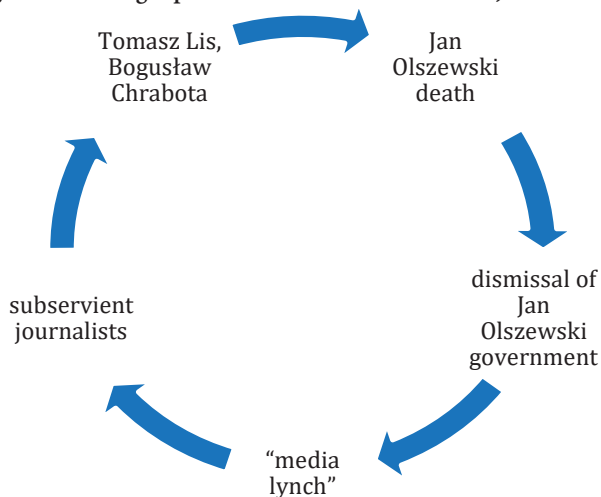
Hyperbole is also used to help exaggerate the tone of the described phenomena, and metaphors are used to make the message more expressive. Memorializing the late Prime Minister of Poland, Jan Olszewski (a lawyer, oppositionist, and Prime Minister of Poland in the years 1991-1992) and his government, *Wiadomości* used the following hyperboles: “monstrous attack on Olszewski’s government” (02.10.19) (describing the critique it faced) or “he led the first really non-Communist government” (08.02.19). Metaphors were used to create an atmosphere of doom, besetment, and attacks. The activities of Frans Timmermans, Executive

² PiS is identified as the ruling party in surveys.

Vice President of the EU Commission, were emphasized: “Timmermans attacked Hungary and the Polish authorities” (02.07.19). In a similar fashion, the local authorities of Warsaw led by Rafał Trzaskowski, the opposition politician of the *Platforma Obywatelska* (PO, Civic Platform), were presented as a group that had entangled the city with “mafia tentacles” (07.02.19).

In the news items of February 2019, three out of the seven programs mentioned two specific journalists. The first was Tomasz Lis, the chief editor of the Polish edition of *Newsweek*, who was presented skeptically as “journalist aristocracy” (the phrase comes from General Wojciech Jaruzelski, the leader of the Polish People’s Republic in 1981-1989, who visited Lis on his TV program) (09.02.19). The second was Bogusław Chrabota, the chief editor of *Rzeczpospolita*, who hosted his program on the independent TV channel Polsat News, and who was presented in *Wiadomości* as “a grandson of a Red Army soldier” (08.02.2019). The 2020 film *Nocna zmiana* (Night Shift) about a journalistic conspiracy in 1992 was mentioned on all three occasions. The film shows the backdrop of the dismissal of the Jan Olszewski government. That one of the films authors, Jacek Kurski, has been the TVP chef since 2016, adds pique to the matter. Both Lis and Chrabota were critical of the PiS government. These examples clearly illustrate the process of linking completely different topics in one news item, to prove a predefined thesis (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Linking topics in the news on the death of Jan Olszewski



Source: Authors

Finally, let us mention one more technique defined as testimonial, by the Institute of Propaganda Analysis (Lee & Lee, 1939). It refers to statements, data, citations, other people, or institutions that can be considered reliable, and thus

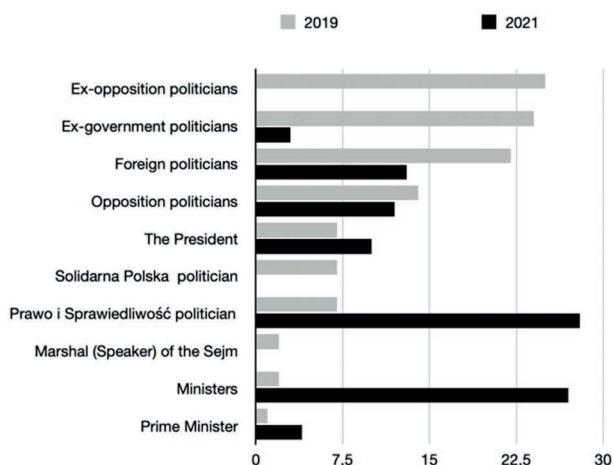
enhance the reliability of the news item (ibid.). Therefore, despite a highly critical attitude towards European institutions and entities of the Western world, TVP cited data of the Federal Statistical Office of Germany and Eurostat (in the news concerning German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Prime Ministers of the Visegrad Group), to prove the achievements of the Polish economy and the increase of the Polish GDP, in comparison to the problems of Germany's economy.

POLITICAL ANNIHILATION OF THE OPPOSITION

The third group of issues revealing the politicization of *Wiadomości* included those that were aimed at deepening the polarization of society annihilating the opposition. In this aspect, it is necessary to return to the mentioned presence of politicians and journalists in the news program.

Regarding the first group (see Figure 5), the appearance of former politicians and oppositionists from the Communist period (n=48) is noticeable in the first studied period. Their appearance was due to the death (on 7 February 2019, during the analyzed week) of Jan Olszewski. Memories of these old former communist politicians were presented in *Wiadomości*. Interestingly, on the anniversary of his death in 2021, the same commemorative material was also included but far fewer former communist politicians (n=3). Mediatization (or medialization in a narrower sense) of history (Korzeniewski, 2007), and its politicization, are increasingly obvious. Qualitative analysis of the material reveals that only those figures whose lives and attitudes match the modern narrative of the PiS party are commemorated.

Figure 5. Politicians (by political party) appearing on *Wiadomości*, during February 4–10 in 2019 and 2021



Source: Authors

However, referring to data for the weeks of 2019 and 2021, a unique situation is visible. Members of the coalition government and politicians of PiS, as the largest party of the *Zjednoczona Prawica*, (ZP, United Right) coalition, were often presented in TVP1's *Wiadomości* (Osęka, 2020).

The overwhelming appearance of the government ministers and PiS politicians in the second period analyzed, in 2021, is significant, although it coincides with the utter absence of politicians from *Solidarna Polska* (SP, United Poland). The SP leader is Zbigniew Ziobro who is the current Minister of Justice and the Attorney General. There were however open tensions between him and both Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of the ZP coalition. Therefore, *Wiadomości* for a while stopped inviting both Ziobro and his SP colleagues to appear in news programs.

Tensions within the *Zjednoczona Prawica* coalition also restricted the participation of the SP politicians in *Wiadomości*'s news programs. This is the reason, Dziubka (2020) argues for SP politicians to be absent in either *Wiadomości* or the TVP Info news channel in August and December 2020. Their absence was not however total. Whenever voters who supported the ZP coalition felt the SP's non-appearance was an incomprehensible anomaly, Zbigniew Ziobro would reappear on either *Wiadomości* or the TVP Info news in some form of close correlation with the political interest of the ZP coalition. This happened during a series of conferences and commentaries after a legal ruling to release Sławomir Nowak, a former collaborator of Donald Tusk. Minister Ziobro rejected this decision, because he saw it as a premise for further reform of the legal system in Poland. Interestingly, EU institutions perceived this reform as a stage in the process of subordinating independent courts in Poland to politicians.

The starting point for most of the news stories is the Manichean vision of the world, with the 'us' vs. 'them' division (Mendeluk, 2018). There are the governing actors (mostly PiS politicians) and Poles who support the authorities on the one side and "total oppositions, elites, judicial caste" (all these terms come from news tickers in *Wiadomości*) on the other. There are also external opponents like Berlin, Brussels, and the EU Commission. Sometimes several such terms were joined in one ticker, as this example shows: "Brussels elites attack Poland again" (02.09.21). It should be noted that these tickers are often perceived as news headlines. In principle, they should indicate the essence of the news. However, in practice, they often offer an emotional hint, becoming an emanation of one of the classic propaganda techniques. These emotional hints can also be found in previews of the news or the news items themselves, as in the following example: "Journalists from the public TV on the one hand receive support, and on the other, they are permanently attacked by not only political activists but also politically engaged journalists" (08.02.2019).

In addition to the Manichean vision of the world, the news writers of *Wiadomości's* programs use numerous epithets, such as “villains”, “thieves” (for slaughterhouse owners) (07.02.2019), “devil Euromaniac flourishing a pitchfork” (about Donald Tusk – former Prime Minister and President of the European Council), “patronizing clot” (again, about Donald Tusk) (10.02.2019) “shady businessman” (about Grzegorz Hajdarowicz, owner of the daily newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*) (08.02.2019).

Repetition of previously broadcast opinions regarding specific issues and of short interviews, is another important persuasion technique. For example, Jan Vincent Rostowski, who had been the Minister of Finance in the PO government for six years (2007-2013), made a statement during the election night on 25.10.2015 that was broadcast a record number of times. Referring to declarations of welfare programs by PiS (in opposition at that time), and the 500+ program in particular (500 PLN allowance for children under 18 years of age) he said: “There just is – and will be – no money for the *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość's* promises”. This statement has been repeated on *Wiadomości* at least 45 times since January 2016; it was also mentioned twice in the studied periods of February 2019 and February 2021. *Wiadomości* recalls Rostowski with pleasure, always in the context of manifesto declarations of the PO party and its credibility (a sarcasm suggesting the total opposite), also in news pieces about the successes of the ensuing governments of Beata Szydło and Mateusz Morawiecki (who was appointed Prime Minister on 11 December 2017 and is still active).

Public service media tries to further strengthen their credibility by undermining the results of external audience surveys and introducing their measurements in this context. Since 2016, TVP has often criticized Nielsen Global Media, a branch of which (Nielsen Audience Measurement – NAM) was the only institution measuring the audience of individual TV channels. Jacek Kurski, head of TVP accused Nielsen of lack of reliability and underreporting of TVP channels' audience data (Pallus, 2016). However, when Nielsen reported a substantial five-figure increase in the audience of *Wiadomości*, there were no complaints of unreliability.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study confirm the first hypothesis that the main TVP news program (*Wiadomości*) does not meet one of the main tasks of a public broadcaster, i.e., the obligation of objectivity and impartiality, due to the increasing politicization of its broadcast news [H1]. Its news program promotes a positive image of PiS and the government, with the visible effect of the increasing presence of PiS politicians in the news programs [H2]. Moreover, the PiS politicians are always related either to the positive tone of the news or to positive epithets describing their activities. The tone of the news is closely and positively related

to news items about the PiS party, which praise the activities of the government and PiS' EU parliament members. The PSM presents positive results of every PiS program, always in the context of failures (according to *Wiadomości*) of the former government [H3]. Due to the tools, methods, and propaganda techniques mentioned above, the news program *Wiadomości* contributes to polarization and societal divisions [H4]. The study of the editions of the news program, concomitant with two years of government dominated by *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, revealed the growing, negative changes in content and form of the news presented in the PSM. The changes described here confirm the deepening process of media politicization.

We mentioned that the model of Polish media before 2015 had a lot of the liberal model qualities, as described by Hallin and Mancini (2004). It is clear that increasing politicization devolves the Polish media system, which we can conclude is similar to the authoritarian model described by Dobek-Ostrowska (2015). She notes that the authoritarian model was the starting point for many Central and East European countries in the early 1990s, while in Poland three decades later we can observe the return of Polish PSM to that starting line. We agree with Karen Donders that PSM in Poland do not participate in democratization processes (even if she focused on her respondents' opinion that the idea of PSM as a centralized institution can be anachronistic) (Donders, 2021). As a concluding remark, we support the idea of the need for healthy and independent public service media in Poland. We can argue that the institutions that safeguard PSM's autonomy need to be strengthened, also through legal protection, so that the public service media in the country fulfil their remit in serving the public and not the political elites and their efforts to maintain their positions in power.

REFERENCES

- Adamowski, J. W. (2001). Media masowe w kampaniach politycznych [Mass media in political campaigns]. In: D. Waniek & J. W. Adamowski (eds.), *Media masowe w praktyce społecznej* (pp. 63-79). Rzeszów: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego.
- Bajomi-Lázár, P. (2015). Variations in media freedom: Why do some governments in Central and Eastern Europe respect media freedom more than other ones? *Central European Journal of Communication*, 8(14), 4–20.
- Bennett, W. L., Lawrence, R. G., & Livingston, S. (2007). *When the press fails*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- Berelson, B. (1952). *Content analysis in communication research*. Glencoe: The Free Press.
- Blumler, J. G., & Gurevitch, M. (1995). *The crisis of public communication*. London and New York: Routledge.

- Bodnar, A. (2020). Skarga na stronniczość *Wiadomości* TVP [Complaint for the bias on the part of *Wiadomości* TVP]. Retrieved April 9, 2021 from www.rpo.gov.pl/pl/content/stronniczosc-wiadomosci-rpo-pisze-do-krritv
- Boykoff, M. T., & Boykoff, J. M. (2007). Climate change and journalistic norms: A case-study of US mass-media coverage. *Geoforum*, 38(6), 1190–1204.
- Broadcasting Act [Ustawa o Radiofonii i Telewizji] (1992). Retrieved April 17, 2021 from <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=wdu19930070034>
- Brüggemann, M., Engesser, S., Büchel, F., Humprecht, E., & Castro, L. (2014). Hallin and Mancini revisited: Four empirical types of Western media systems. *Journal of Communication*, 64(6), 1037–1065.
- CBOS (2018). Czy PiS wyprowadza Polskę z Unii Europejskiej? [Is the Law and Justice party taking Poland out of the European Union?]. Retrieved April 14, 2021 from www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K_154_18.PDF
- Ciaglia, A. (2013). Politics in the media and the media in politics: A comparative study of the relationship between the media and political systems in three European countries. *European Journal of Communication*, 28(5), 541–555.
- Dąbrowska, Z. (2021, April 14). Sondaż: PiS z 31 proc. poparcia. Hołownia przed Koalicją Obywatelską [Survey results: 31% support for PiS. Hołownia precedes the Civic Coalition]. *Rzeczpospolita* Retrieved April 17, 2021 from www.rp.pl/Polityka/304149919-Sondaz-PiS-z-31-proc-poparcia-Holownia-przed-Koalicja-Obywatelska.html
- Dobek-Ostrowska, B. (2010). System partyjny a media w Polsce – zależności i relacje [The party system vs. media in Poland – Dependencies and relations]. *Studia Medioznawcze*, 2(41), 13–26.
- Dobek-Ostrowska, B. (2015). Między politologią i komunikologią: razem czy osobno? Przypadek studiów porównawczych nad relacjami polityki i mediów w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej [Between political and communication sciences: Together or separate? Comparative studies on politics and media relations in Central and Eastern Europe]. *Politeja*, 12(36), 27–50.
- Dobek-Ostrowska, B. (2019). *Polish media system in a comparative perspective: Media in politics, politics in media*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- Donders, K. (2021). *Public service media in Europe: Law, theory and practice*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Dopierała, W., & Ossowski, S. (2018). Polityzacja audycji informacyjnych w Polsce na przykładzie *Wiadomości* TVP i „Faktów” TVN [Politicization of the news in Poland: A case study of *Wiadomości* TVP and *Fakty* TVN]. *Com.press*, 2(1), 4–25.
- Dragomir, M. (2005). Overview. In M. Dragomir (ed.), *Television across Europe: Regulation, policy and independence*, vol. 1 (pp. 13–184). Budapest: Open Society Institute.
- Dziubka, K. (2020). Ziobryści znowu wycięci z TVP Info [Members of the Solidary Poland party of Zbigniew Ziobro cut out from TVP Info again]. Retrieved April 16, 2021 from <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/tvp-znow-nie-zaprasza-ludzi-zbigniewa-ziobry/tb5hmms>
- Feldman, L., Hart, P. S., & Milosevic, T. (2017). Polarizing news? Representations of threat and efficacy in leading US newspapers' coverage of climate change. *Public Understanding of Science*, 26(4), 481–497.
- Freedom House (2020). Poland. Retrieved March 29, 2021 from <https://freedomhouse.org/country/poland/nations-transit/2020>

- Hallin, D., & Mancini, P. (2004). *Comparing media systems. Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Herbut, R. (2002). *Teoria i praktyka funkcjonowania partii politycznych* [Theory and practice of political parties]. Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego.
- Jaskiernia, A., & Pokorna-Igantowicz, K. (2017). Public service media vs. sovereign national media: Transition of public service media in Poland. In M. Głowacki & A. Jaskiernia (eds.), *Public service media renewal. Adaptation to digital network challenges* (pp. 171–192). New York: Peter Lang.
- Klepka, R. (2018). Medialna walka o dobrą zmianę. Obraz wyborów parlamentarnych w 2015 w wybranych mediach [Media fight for a good change. The image of the parliamentary elections in 2015 in selected media]. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Libron – Filip Lohner.
- Korzeniewski, B. (2007). Medializacja i mediatyzacja pamięci – nośniki pamięci i ich rola w kształtowaniu pamięci przeszłości [Medialization and mediatization of memory – memory carriers and their role in shaping memory of the past]. *Kultura Współczesna*, 53(3), 5–23.
- Kucharski, S. (2019). Miliardy w rekompensacie [Billions in compensation]. *Press*, 34. <https://www.press.pl/magazyn-press/artukul/56380,miliard-w-rekompensacie>
- Lee, A., & Lee, E. B. (1939). *The fine art of propaganda*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Mendeluk, P. (2018). Trzy koncepcje zła w myśli filozoficznej oraz religijnej [Three concepts of evil in philosophical and religious thought]. *Studia z historii filozofii*, 4(9), 217–235.
- Mielczarek, T. (2007). *Monopol. Pluralizm. Koncentracja. Środki masowego komunikowania w latach 1989-2006* [Monopoly. Pluralism. Concentration. Mass media in 1989-2006]. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne.
- Miżejewski, M. (2018). Polityczne konsekwencje nowelizacji ustaw medialnych w Polsce w latach 2015-2016 [Political consequences of the amendments to the media acts in Poland in the years 2015-2016]. *Politeja – Pismo Wydziału Studiów Międzynarodowych i Politycznych Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*, 15(55), 285–307.
- Nowak-Teter, E. (2021). Krytyczne studia nad dyskursem mediów publicznych na przykładzie Wiadomości TVP 1 [Critical studies of the public media discourse: A case study of Wiadomości TVP1]. *Res Rethorica*, 8(1), 41–66.
- Oniszczyk, Z. (2011). Mediatyzacja polityki i polityzacja mediów. Dwa wymiary wzajemnych relacji [Mediatization of politics and politicization of media. Two dimensions of mutual relations]. *Studia Medioznawcze*, 4(47), 18–20.
- Oseka, P. (2020). *Wiadomości wywindowały sztukę manipulacji na nieznany dotąd poziom. Ale nie wygrały Dudzie wyborów* [Wiadomości upgraded the art of manipulation to unprecedented levels. But it did not win the elections for Duda]. Retrieved April 14, 2021 from <https://oko.press/wiadomosci-wywindowaly-sztuke-manipulacji-na-nieznany-dotad-poziom-ale-nie-wygraly-dudzie-wyborow>
- Owruszko, J. (2019). Abonament RTV zostanie zlikwidowany, bo większość osób go nie płaci. Kto jest zwolniony z abonamentu radiowo-telewizyjnego? [The radio and TV subscription will be abolished, as most people do not pay it. Who is exempted from this subscription?]. *Polska Times*, 5 September. Retrieved March 16, 2021 from <https://polskatimes.pl/abonament-rtv-zostanie-zlikwidowany-bo-wiekszosc-osob-go-nie-placi-kto-jest-zwolniony-z-abonamentu-radiowotelewizyjnego/ar/c1-14399589>

- Pallus, P. (2016). Prezes TVP kontra Nielsen. O co chodzi w tej wojnie? [The president of the Public TV versus Nielsen. What is this war about?]. Retrieved April 17, 2021 from <https://businessinsider.com.pl/media/tv-radio/jacek-kurski-atakuj-nielsena/0qq7jrb>
- Pisarek, W. (1983). *Analiza zawartości prasy* [Press content analysis]. Kraków: Ośrodek Badań Prasoznawczych.
- Reporters Without Borders (2020). The world press freedom index. Retrieved April 17, 2021 from <https://rsf.org/fr/classement>
- Reuters Institute (2020). *Reuters Institute digital news report*. Retrieved April 17, 2021 from https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2020-06/DNR_2020_FINAL.pdf
- Secklecka, A. (2017). *Rytuały medialne w komunikowaniu masowym. Przypadek polskich serwisów informacyjnych Fakty TVN i Wiadomości TVP* [Media rituals in mass communication. A case study of the Polish news programs *Fakty TVN* and *Wiadomości TVP*]. Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika.
- Seymour-Ure, C. (1974). *The political impact of mass media*. London: Constable.
- Siebert, F. S., Peterson, T., Schramm, W. (1956). *Four theories of the press. The authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and soviet communist concepts of what the press should be and do*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois.
- Silverman, D. (2011). *Interpreting qualitative data: A guide to the principles of qualitative research*. London: Sage.
- Szot, L. (2020). Między wolnością a upolitycznieniem mediów publicznych [Between freedom and politicization of public media]. *Przegląd Politologiczny*, 2, 157–177.
- Wąsicka, M. (2014). Politicization of the Polish media or mediatization of Polish politics? Where the worlds of the media and politics permeate. *Central European Political Studies*, 1, 141–155.
- Węglińska, A. (2018). *Dziennikarze telewizji publicznej w Polsce – między polityką, misją a rynkiem* [The journalists of public television in Poland – between remit, political pressures and market]. Wrocław: University of Lower Silesia Publishing.
- Wirtualnedia (2021). *Fakty liderem oglądalności w marcu. Wszystkie dzienniki z dużymi spadkami* [Fakty as the leader of viewership in March. All TV news with significant decreases]. Retrieved April 11, 2021 from www.wirtualnedia.pl/artykul/fakty-lider-programy-informacyjne-prowadzacy-marzec-2021-rok-opinie-piotr-krasko-wiadomosci-stracily-700-tys-widzow
- Wirtualnedia (2018). *Telewizja Polska chwali się oglądalnością Wiadomości z własnego pomiaru, a innych programów i TVP Info – z badania Nielsena* [The Public Television boasts about news viewership according to their own measurements, and other programs and TVP Info – from the Nielsen study]. Retrieved April 18, 2021 from www.wirtualnedia.pl/artykul/tvp-chwali-sie-ogladalnoscia-wiadomosci-z-wlasnego-pomiaru-a-innych-programow-z-badania-nielsena
- Włodarczyk, W. C. (2020). Uwagi o pandemii COVID-19 w Polsce. Perspektywa polityki zdrowotnej [Remarks on the COVID-19 pandemics in Poland. The health policy perspective]. *Zdrowie Publiczne i Zarządzanie*, 18(2), 126–148.
- Zamana, J. (2016). Styl przywództwa Jarosława Kaczyńskiego. Analiza retrospektywna [The leadership style of Jarosław Kaczyński: A retrospective analysis]. *Studia Krytyczne/Critical Studies*, 2, 201–213.