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ADAM SZYNOL (2023). THROUGH THE EYES OF THE CHIEFS. REGIONAL PRESS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ITS (FORMER) EDITORS, WROCŁAW, 178 PP., ISBN: 978-83-7977-783-9.

Followers of the discussion around the condition of the regional press segment in Poland in the last few years will have seen that it focuses on two main areas. The first involves the consequences of the decreasing importance of printed editions, enforcing the need to digitize the regional press. The second involves the functioning of regional dailies after the withdrawal from the Polish market in 2021 of the German publishing group Verlagsgruppe Passau and the takeover of this publisher's regional titles by PKN Orlen, a company controlled by the State Treasury. The latter event was a consequence of the announcement by the right-wing ruling party, Law and Justice, of its pre-2023 policy about the need to repolonize the media in Poland. This event meant that the largest publisher of regional press in Poland became an entity dependent on politicians, in which the authorities change depending on the results of the parliamentary elections.

In such a situation, the book, based on research with the participation of editors-in-chief of most regional dailies published by Polska Press Grupa, who held their positions before the takeover of PPG by PKN Orlen deserve the attention. For several or even dozen of years, these former editors-in-chief were responsible for the functioning of individual editorial offices in the provinces. It's also worth to appreciate the author's reaction to the changes that have influenced the shape of the regional press. This work is even more valuable in the context of the observed shortage of empirical research on the functioning and status of journalists of regional media in Poland.

The book consists of four chapters. In the first two, the author synthetically presents the functioning of the regional newspaper segment in Poland after 1989. This part discusses the transformation of the regional press, investments made in the regional press market by foreign investors, the decreasing importance of printed editions of regional newspapers, and the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for the regional press. In the third chapter, the author presents in detail the process of repolonization of the regional press, which took place during the rule of Law and Justice, as well as the reactions of the media and political environment to the purchase of regional newspapers by a state-controlled company.

The essence of the book lies in the fourth chapter. In it, the author presents the results of research on the regional press, which was based on interviews with 14 editors-in-chief of regional dailies belonging to Polska Press Grupa. Most of those journalists lost their positions, following the Orlen takeover of PPG publishing house. Only one of the interviewees continued to manage the editorial office after the ownership changes.

The author's research provides knowledge in three areas. First, the editors-in-chief diagnose the most important problems they faced while working in their positions. Secondly, they present the process of ownership changes and the purchase of regional dailies by PKN Orlen from their perspective. Thirdly, the respondents referring to their professional experiences assess what the future of the regional press will look like under the management of Orlen, which is a business operating in the fuel sector.

The scope of research constructed in this way provides a lot of empirical data from the editorial offices about how the regional press has operated in recent years. In this way, the work broadens the scope of knowledge about the regional press in Poland and fills the research gap in this area.

It is worth noting that the editors-in-chief mentioned other important problems for the regional press beyond their concerns about the decline in sales of paper newspapers and the need to digitalize the media. An important issue was the financial situation of the editorial offices and the pressure to generate income for the owners, while the economic situation in terms of the regional press was deteriorating. This is an important area because it also affects the status and professional position of regional journalists. This, in turn, is related to the lack of staff, which some editors-in-chief also indicated as a problem when it comes to the functioning of the editorial offices. This issue has a broader dimension. On the one hand, there is a question about the professional preparation and financial expectations of young journalists entering the profession. On the other hand, there is the question of what the editorial offices of the regional press have to offer job candidates, who would constitute the strength of individual editorial offices. The latter issue relates to the serious problems in the lowering of the status of regional journalists as an attractive profession.

An interesting thread of research is the issue of the political independence of the editorial office and the ensuing pressure on editors-in-chief and individual journalists. The problem is exacerbated not only by the regional dailies largely were owned by foreigner holders but also by the tense relationship between the editorial office and, for example, the advertising departments in individual publishing house.

The research presented in the book also covers the most discussed issue of recent years in the context of the functioning of regional dailies in Poland—the purchase of Polska Press Grupa by the PKN Orlen concern. The author

interviewed former editors-in-chief of individual PPG newspapers to present their perspectives of the changes in terms of ownership, showing how the entry of a company controlled by the State Treasury into the press business was received by journalistic teams and consequences it had for regional editorial offices. The former editors-in-chief also try to present a catalogue of the challenges facing current editors-in-chief of dailies owned by Orlen.

These challenges can be divided into several areas. They concern market issues, i.e. creating a strategy for the functioning of Polska Press Grupa, which can allow them to retain older readers, but also to attract younger ones. The first element of this process is the completion of the digitization of regional press and the concept of monetization of online content. Another challenge is the response to the outflow of staff from regional journalism. The second area is related to the fulfillment of the function of journalism. If the owner of regional editorial offices is a company dependent on politics and susceptible to electoral changes, how is the regional press supposed to build its credibility, fulfill a control function towards the government and function during an election campaign?

All these questions are important for the discussion about regional newspapers in Poland. This book is an element of the discussion because it broadens the scope of knowledge about the regional press. The topics discussed in it also open the field for further empirical research in this area.

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