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## **International project:** *Media coverage of the Polish EU presidency*

Effectively conducted, the EU presidency can improve the image of the country holding this position. This is particularly true for countries that are holding the chairmanship of the EU Council for the first time. During the six-month period of the presidency the country attracts foreign media attention, not only as a host of numerous meetings and events, but also as an actor in charge of defining the major directions of the EU policy. Therefore, that time could be spent on achieving political goals and building an image as an important and effective EU member, as well as an attractive country for tourists and entrepreneurs. In many cases, however, internal political events such as elections, political tensions, or controversies over domestic issues seem to take over the atmosphere around the country.

The project *Media coverage of the Polish EU presidency* was designed to analyze how the Polish presidency in the EU Council was covered and interpreted by news media in Poland and other European countries. Since scholars from other countries were invited to participate in this project, the comparative analysis was conducted in two areas: (1) the countries' experience of the EU presidency; (2) the media coverage of the Polish presidency.

Theme (1) requires a broader interdisciplinary perspective to study how the presidency builds a country's position within the EU structures and how the presidency can be used to create or change a country's image. First, one should consider the actual concept of the EU presidency and the expectations towards the country that is holding this position at the time. Then, one may consider such issues as: instruments that can and should be used to create that country's positive image; events or activities that attract the media and international audience's attention; the stumbling blocks, threats and major challenges.

Theme (2) requires the media content analysis (both qualitative and quantitative). The major issues here are: frequency of covering the coun-

try in the media during the period of the EU presidency, dominant frames and perspectives used in the materials, the sources of information presented in the media (journalist, foreign correspondent, news agencies, other media), particular topics (EU-related and non-EU-related), major actors, as well as opinions expressed in the comments and analyses and the sources of the comments and analyses. By analyzing the media coverage in the country holding the position and in the other countries one may recognize the similarities and differences in attention and perspectives.

### **Theoretical background**

The media seem to be a crucial source of knowledge about other countries for most people, thus they can be expected to have a tremendous impact on how we comprehend the world and communicate with people of different nationalities. Namely, because most people do not have personal knowledge of foreign events, the agenda setting effect of foreign news will loom stronger than that of domestic counterparts (Hargrove, Stempel, 2002; Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004). Moreover, exposure to foreign news has an impact on attitudes and opinions concerning foreign countries (Semetko, Brzinski, Weaver, Willnat, 1992).

Thus, in contemporary international relations, image politics – that is the ability to project a prestigious or powerful image – is as vital to a nation's foreign policy arsenal as political, economic and military strength (Gilboa, 2004; Nye, 2004; Ociepka, 2008; 2012). It means that all countries desire high-visibility, positive world images (Manheim, 1994; Kunczik, 2003). For that purpose, governmental public diplomacy increasingly resembles corporate public relations strategies or global branding campaigns to attract media attention and influence world public opinion in order to affect foreign governments, tourism, and corporate investment (Signitzer, Coombs, 1992; Rivenburgh, 2010). One of the strategies of media management is hosting an event that may attract media attention.

According to the model developed by Manheim (1994), for countries with a very low or very high level of visibility and negative image valance, hosting a global media event may not be the best option. But, the cumulative events provide an opportunity for gradual image enhancement. Indeed, during the six-month period of the presidency a government can attempt to attract foreign media attention, not only as a host of numerous

meetings and events, but also as an actor in charge, at least calling for certain actions and solutions to the problems the EU might be facing at that time. In fact, all of a government's behavior, its decisions, actions, initiatives or events, may be perceived as particular signals sent to international public opinion in order to influence the state's image.

On the other hand, foreign news has already been a topic of research for a long time. The early empirical studies from the 1950s (Kayser, 1953) certified the significance of Europe in the media around the world and revealed a bias in foreign news coverage. Two decades later, a study conducted by Gerbner and Marvanyi (1977) showed, again, a difference between the 'real' map of the world with the maps ('the worlds') of news. The findings of a content analysis of 60 newspapers from nine countries clearly showed that the "necessarily arbitrary assumption that each region has equal chance of newsworthiness" could not be supported. The same conclusion was drawn from other studies, including the study of Norwegian newspapers coverage of the conflicts in Cuba, Congo and Cyprus conducted by J. Galtung and M. Ruge (1965) and the study *Foreign Images*, conducted under the supervision of the International Association for Mass Communication Research (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1985).

One main result from the studies mentioned above was that, everywhere in the world, foreign news "devoted most attention to events happening within and to actors belonging to its immediate geographical region" (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1984). The concept of regionalism seems to be supported also by more recent international media content studies. For example, J. Wilke and C. Heimprecht (2010) showed that in five European countries included in the project *Foreign News on TV* (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal, and Switzerland) almost half of the items (49 percent) of foreign news on TV newscasts was devoted to events in Europe, while the numbers in other regions were significantly lower: in Asia one third of the items (32 percent) covered European issues, in South America: 23 percent, in the Middle East: 22 percent, and in North America: only 17 percent. At the same time, the level of interest in their own region was relatively higher.

In second place, superpowers were covered, thirdly regions with ongoing crises. Only afterwards there remained some space (if any) for smaller and less important countries. Therefore, the global-level research on international news flow generally assumes that international news coverage reflects the structure of power among nations. The crafting of media messages, including those focused on international events, however, is also

subject to local influences. Included are organizational factors, a local community's power structure and corporate characteristics. These influences are likely to affect not only the type of foreign news that appears in the media, but also the quality and depth of this coverage.

The classic concept of foreign news value, developed by J. Galtung and M. Ruge (1965), includes twelve factors that influence whether an event will become a news item: short duration, reference to elite nations, reference to elite persons, surprise, intensity, relevance, negativeness, personification, continuity, importance, obviousness, and complementary character. In general, this theory purports that the economic, social, political and geographic characteristics of a nation determine the amount of coverage one country receives in the press of another.

Subsequent studies have sought to map the features and factors that render an event newsworthy. Content-based studies show that variation in the amount of foreign news is correlated with political systems and economic development (Chang, Lee, 1992). In particular, according to Wu's (2000) results of a meta-analysis of 55 studies investigating the determinants of international news flow (mostly from the 1980s and 1990s), among the components embedded in the world structure, one may distinguish between a few major categories of factors, namely economic status, political status, technological development, cultural and geographical proximity. Then come the following factors: GNP *per capita*, index of economic development, population or size of nation, cultural proximity, former colonial ties, ideological groupings, language factor, geographic proximity, elite status, media facilities and equipment, communication access and technologies, and international news service (Wu, 1998).

Based on the concepts mentioned above, we can make certain assumptions about the attention paid by news media to events in foreign countries. The amount of news coverage depends on the proximity (or distance) between the countries, on their ethnographic, political or economic relations. We assume that the smaller the distance, the more complex is the picture of the country in the media (more topics and events covered by the news media). On the contrary, if the distance must be compensated by other news factors, this might favor a preference for particular topics, including conflict and violence. Considering the formats of presentation, European countries will be covered prominently in Europe, but the actual amount of news coverage will depend on the attributes and roles played by the country within the region.

Numerous media content studies have been conducted within the European context in previous decades. While some of them were devoted to analyzing the media coverage of major European events, others aimed at studying the contribution of the press to the Europeanization of the public sphere. For example, C. de Vreese (2001a, 2001b) examined the news agenda and the role played by national news organizations in three countries (Great Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands) in covering the January 1999 first-step introduction of the euro, the June 1999 European parliamentary elections, and the December 2000 summit in Nice. The findings showed that the news coverage of European affairs is cyclical, peaking during the events but hardly visible before and after. Furthermore, news organizations differed not only in terms of attention devoted to these events, but also in editorial policy and the degree of effort invested in covering the events.

Among EU-related events, the European parliamentary elections seem to attract regular media attention. Hence, the media coverage of these elections has been a subject of interest for many scholars, including J. Wilke and C. Reinemann (2007), M. Maier, J. Strömbäck, and L. L. Kaid (2012), and C. de Vreese (2001c). At the same time, much scholarship has examined the media coverage of European referendum campaigns (de Vreese, Semetko 2004a; de Vreese, Boomgaarden 2005). A separate segment of media research within the EU context is devoted to examining the role of the media in the process of European integration (de Vreese, Semetko, 2002; 2004b; Boomgaarden, Vliegthart, Schuck, de Vreese, 2010).

Before Poland's accession to the EU in 2003, several studies were conducted on the foreign media coverage of the country. Their findings revealed a low visibility and recognition, as well as a rather neutral or negative image of the country in other European countries (Kolarska-Bobińska, 2003; Warchala, 2002; Sikorska, 2000). Namely, in the early 2000s, 50–70 percent of respondents in six countries (Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, and Sweden) seemed to have no opinion about Poland at all at that time (Kolarska-Bobińska, 2003). Among those who expressed an opinion, only around 10 percent believed in the existence of a market orientation in the Polish economy, and only one third of Austrians and Germans perceived the Polish parliamentary system as “similar to the system developed in Western Europe” (Warchala, 2002). Furthermore, findings from media content analysis revealed that Poland was portrayed in news media mostly as a “peripheral, traditional Catholic country with an underdeveloped economy” (Warchala, 2002). In general,

Poland was presented as a country “like other EU Members.” The studies mentioned above also revealed an inconsistency in the amount of the press coverage: while news media in Germany paid most attention to Poland in the late 1990s and early 2000s, in Spain and Sweden the coverage of Poland was rather limited.

### The study

While much scholarship is focused either on short-duration events or long-term relations between EU institutions (Trenz, 2004), media and public opinion and the process of EU integration, less attention is paid to a single country’s performance during the EU presidency. Previous studies devoted to this topic were exclusively national in scope (Ekengren, 2004; Quagliia, E. Moxon-Browne, 2006). This study provides an original contribution to the research on media coverage of EU-related events by collecting data from seven countries. The Polish EU presidency could be perceived as a case study in the examination of foreign media coverage of a country holding the leading position within the EU Council. In particular, the study provides an opportunity to analyze an image of a country that is holding this position for the very first time. Due to the explorative nature of the study, content analysis addressed the following major research questions:

*RQ1: How many news items published in the news media during the period of the Polish EU presidency actually referred to that event?*

The project provided an opportunity to check how many items in the news media outside Poland were devoted to Poland and how many of them were inspired by the topic of the presidency. In other words, we aimed at recognizing the actual, not just potential, power of the presidency in attracting media attention.

*RQ2: What topics were covered by the news media?*

As the studies on agenda-setting show, by focusing attention on particular events and topics, the media can influence the public perception of the object, in this case – a country (McCombs, 2006; Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004; Wanta, Mikusova, 2010). Besides investigating items related to the presidency, we examined all the items about Poland published in the period of six months of hosting this position. This allowed us to identify the picture of the country that was drawn by the foreign media in comparison to the image of the presidency in the Polish media.

*RQ3: How was Poland introduced and portrayed in the items?*

One of the variables in the codebook was designed to identify the main role in which Poland was presented in news items relating to the Polish EU presidency. We assumed that Poland might have been introduced either by EU membership (EU member, new EU member, host or venue of the event) or by historical and geographic features (post-communist country, Central European country).

*RQ4: What was the dominant attitude towards Poland presented in the news?*

The final variable in the codebook was designed to learn how news media evaluated the way Poland conducted the presidency. This evaluation was mainly carried out for opinion articles. For news items it was only coded when a clear explicit evaluation was noticed in the respective article.

The study included ten countries: Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Estonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Sweden (see Appendix for the list of participants). The data from Germany was collected and analyzed by the Austrian team. The findings presented in this *Special Issue*, however, will come from six countries, including Poland. Systematic selection of countries is unquestionably crucial for a comparative study. Since we were interested in European countries as units of analysis, we followed the principle of including countries from different regions of Europe.

The call for cooperation was announced among the members of two international organizations, that is the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA), and the International Communication Association (ICA). Scholars from fifteen countries responded to the call. During the course of the research process, however, five countries eventually dropped their participation for financial and logistic reasons. These countries were Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark, Hungary, and Slovakia. Nevertheless, the final selection of countries still included Western, Southern, Northern, and Eastern regions of the European Union. In other words, it was not biased toward any particular region. Moreover, the sample includes countries with a long tradition of EU membership, as well as relatively new EU members. However, both the number and content of the sample of countries may affect the findings, since the most euroskeptic countries, such as Great Britain, are not included in the sample. Taking this shortcoming into consideration, we will avoid generalizations of the findings.

The empirical analysis focused on the Polish EU presidency that started on July 1, 2011, and ended on December 31, 2011. Thus, we decided to gather the data from June 15, 2011 till January 15, 2012 in three six-week periods: June 5–July 30, September 1–October 15, December 1–January 15. Due to the fact that not all national teams followed this pattern, the actual numbers might be confusing. In order to avoid any bias we use percentages as a method of presenting the findings. Journalistic materials (news items, comments, reports, editorials, etc.) published in these periods were selected for the study by using *Poland* as a keyword. Next, within the collected items, a sub-category of the sample was created by using *EU presidency* as a keyword this time. As a result, we got two kinds of stories: (1) related to Poland (in general), and (2) related directly to the topic of Poland holding the position at the EU Council.

- The choice of media organizations was based on the following pattern:
- (1) each team was expected to analyze the content of at least one or two national daily newspapers, one popular/tabloid newspaper and one weekly magazine. However, not all national teams followed this pattern. For example, in Belgium the sample consisted of only one quality newspaper, one popular newspaper and one weekly magazine, while in Greece as many as nine online news organizations were studied, but only two traditional printed newspapers. Thus, while presenting the findings we will spread the data into separate lines for different types of media;
  - (2) the research team recorded newscasts that are broadcast across the respective country: the main newscast of the country's public service broadcasting station and the most popular newscast of a privately owned (or commercial) station, based on viewership ratings;
  - (3) online media were selected based on their popularity measured by the number of users.

Alongside national media organizations' coverage, the content of the international TV news station *Euronews* was analyzed. Since 1993, when *Euronews* was launched, the station has been extending its scope and program while emphasizing its European character at the same time. According to the distribution report published in July 2008 (Euronews, 2008), *Euronews* was a leading international news channel in Europe with a daily reach of 6.6 million viewers (2.9 million by satellite and cable and 3.7 million by terrestrial network) which is more than *CNN* (1.7 million) and *BBC World* (1.2 million). Also, according to the European Media and Marketing Survey (EMS July 2008) on the European markets (20 coun-

tries), *Euronews* is one of the most popular international TV news channels with a weekly reach of 17.6%, that is more than *CNN* (16.7%) and *BBC World* (12.4%).

On the other hand, *Euronews* was created as a competitor to *CNN*, to block its growing influence on the European television news market. This defensive strategy is still one of the fundamental philosophical guidelines behind *Euronews* that has affected both the format and the content, which might be briefly described as 'reporting world news from a European perspective'. The station is produced by an operating subsidiary company SOCIEMIE created by a consortium of public service shareholders from the European and Mediterranean Area (SECEMIE) and sponsored extensively by the European Commission (grants). Considering its features, *Euronews* may be perceived as an important channel of information about Europe and European Union for the international audience. Table 1 presents the sample.

Table 1

## Sample

Country	Media organizations	Period of analysis	Items about Poland (total number)	Items about Poland EU Presidency (%)
1	2	3	4	5
Austria	Der Standard Die Presse Kronenzeitung Profil	15.06–31.07.2011 01.09.–15.10.2011 01.12.2011–15.01.2012	795	7.2
Belgium	De Morgen De Standaard Het Laatste Nieuws Het Nieuwsblad Knack De Tijd Het Belang van Limburg Gazet van Antwerpen	15.06.2011–17.01.2012	735	1.6
Estonia	delfi.ee epl.ee postimees.ee err.ee	15.06.2011–15.01.2012	1099	3.5
Germany	Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung Süddeutsche Zeitung Bild Der Spiegel	15.06–31.07.2011 01.09.–15.10.2011 01.12.2011–15.01.2012	1353	5.5

1	2	3	4	5
Greece	<i>Online media:</i> ert.gr skai.gr aixmi.gr madata.gr newsit.gr newsbomb.gr <i>Online newspapers:</i> tovima.gr avgi.gr eleftherotypia.gr	15.06.2011–30.01.2012 15.06.2011–15.01.2012 15.06.2011–15.01.2012 01.07– 31.12.2011 01.07– 31.12.2011 01.07– 31.12.2011	476	16.7
	<i>Weekly newspapers:</i> Kiriakatiki Eleftherotipia To Vima	15.06.2011–18.12.2011 15.06.2011–15.01.2012	78	23.6
	<i>Television:</i> SKAI Television NET	15.06.2011–15.01.2012 15.06.2011–30.01.2012	14	42.9
Poland	Gazeta Wyborcza Rzeczpospolita Fakt Nasz Dziennik Polityka Wprost Uwazam rze	15.06–31.07.2011 01.09–15.10.2011 01.12.2011–15.01.2012	767*	
Portugal	Diario de Noticias Publico Correio de Manha Visao	January–June 2011 July–December 2011	134	26.0
Romania	<i>Newspapers:</i> Jurnalul National Ad- evarul Romania Libera Libertatea Revista 22	1.06.2011 – 15.01.2012	1668	15.7
	<i>Online:</i> Hotnews Ziare.com Euractiv		1047	36.2
Spain	El Pais	15.06–31.12.2012	51	41.2
Euronews		30.03.2011–30.01.2012	71	22.0

\* In the case of the Polish sample only items related to the Polish EU presidency were coded.

The first stage in preparing for the content analysis was the development of the codebook. The codebook was prepared in English, the common language used by all the participants in the project. The final draft of

the codebook was distributed to all the participating researchers and additional comments and suggestions were solicited. The final version was confirmed during a seminar that took place in Poznań on March 22–24, 2012. The codebook included sixteen variables, including the date of publication, news media, genres, front page position of the item, size of the item, visual elements, source of information, author of opinion, one dominant topic area and particular topics (up to three), strategies of domestication, roles of Poland and attitude towards Poland. Each team was in charge of collecting and training the coders. The number of coders varied from one in Estonia to six in Poland. Reliability among the coders was established as a precondition for going ahead with the actual coding of the items.

The comparative research started at the beginning of 2012, although the process of collecting the data started in some countries as soon as on July 1, 2011. The preliminary results of the analysis were available in spring 2012 and presented during a seminar in March 2012. The outcomes of the project were also presented during a special session of the Congress of Political Scientists in Poznań, Poland that took place on September 19–21, 2012.

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The following papers presented in the *Special Issue* include findings from a quantitative analysis conducted by national research teams. The papers are presented in alphabetical order, based on the names of the countries (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Greece, Poland, and Romania). Since there were three separate research teams from Greece (studying the content of different media organizations), as many as three papers include their results. Finally, in order to achieve a more complete picture of Polish media coverage, one paper is devoted to a qualitative content analysis.

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## Appendix

### PARTICIPANTS OF THE PROJECT

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