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The Polish EU presidency in the Polish press: Did we actually notice it?

Introduction

Poland held the presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2011. For each country the presidency of the Council of the EU is a challenge since it has to ensure a smooth EU decision-making process, to achieve progress on issues of great importance both to the country and the rest of Europe, to represent the country, and to strengthen its position on the international stage. All these aims seem even more important for a country which is holding this position for the first time. As a result, numerous analyses were conducted before, during, and right after the presidency (Albrycht & Weć, 2011; Barcz, 2011; Czachór & Tomaszuk, 2010; Fuksiewicz & Szczepanik, 2010; Gromadzki, 2010; Grosse, 2007; Łada, 2011; Riedel, 2010; see also papers published in the first part of this *Special Issue*). While most of these analyses focused on the political, legal, and institutional aspects of the presidency, we decided to examine the media coverage of Poland's performance. It is worth mentioning that a similar study was conducted by scholars at Silesia University (Kolczyński, 2013). Therefore, we may compare the findings and draw a broader picture of the image of the Polish EU presidency in the Polish print media.

The aim of this paper is to present the findings of a quantitative content analysis of the Polish print media. In particular, we focused on: (1) the number of items covering events related to the presidency, (2) prominence of the topic, (3) genres, (4) main topics, (5) authors of news, (6) author of opinions, and (7) the way Polish journalists evaluated Poland's performance during the EU presidency.

Study¹

The paper addresses three main research questions:

RQ1: How much attention did the Polish media pay to the topics related to the EU presidency?

According to the concept of priming (Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Brewer, Graf, Willnat, 2003; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Weaver, 2007) the media are able to affect an audience's perception and evaluation of an event's prominence by using such editorial strategies as the size of the item and its placement in the newspaper. Namely, the longer the item and the more exposed it is in the media, the more important it seems to be to the audience (the most important topics are covered, or at least introduced, on the front page). Therefore, the prominence of the theme will be measured not only by the actual numbers of the items, but also by analyzing the placement of the items in the newspapers. Additionally, we will study which topics (or events) were covered by the Polish media in the framework of the EU presidency.

RQ2: Which roles did the Polish media play during the EU presidency?

Covering European events is – as B. Ociepka (2011) notices – a relatively new topic in post-communist Central Europe. In Poland, the issue became significantly relevant before accession in 2004. Recent research on the coverage of European events and policy suggests that the media present a positive but rather simplified picture of Europe and the EU (Ociepka, 1998, 2005, 2011; Świerszczyński, 2004). Covering the EU issues requires not only the knowledge about both internal and international politics, but also a deep understanding of the idea of the European integration process (Szymczyński, 2011). One of the aims of the project was to recognize which roles the Polish media played during the EU presidency: whether they focused more on providing information (the role of news disseminator), or on analyzing issues and problems related to the topic of the EU presidency and EU policy in general.

In order to answer this question the following aspects will be studied: the genres, the authors of news, and the authors of opinions. We will ana-

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lyze how many items there were covering the events and how many items were devoted to presenting comment and interpretation. Furthermore, we will analyze who wrote the news items (whether it was a correspondent, or a staff member), and who was invited to present their opinions (politicians, experts, citizens, or journalists).

RQ3: How did the Polish media evaluate Poland's performance when holding the position at the EU Council?

In case of the Polish media, the evaluation of Poland's performance during the EU presidency may be affected by the political orientation of a given media organization. Since all the major events relating to the presidency were organized by the government (of Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform] and Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe [Polish People's Party]) and its agents, journalists from anti-governmental media organizations could criticize the political parties in power by criticizing their performance during the EU presidency period. Thus, we assumed that the coverage would be politically biased.

The data for the Polish study were gathered in three six-week periods: June 15–July 30, September 1–October 15, December 1–January 15. Journalistic materials (news items, comment, reports, editorials, etc.) published in these periods were selected for the study by using *EU presidency* as a keyword. As a result, all items in the Polish sample were related directly to the topic of Poland holding the position in the EU Council.

The choice of media organizations was based on the following pattern: 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. In the case of the Polish sample, due to a high level of political parallelism, we decided to add one more criterion, that is the political orientation of the media organization. Therefore, we selected three national daily newspapers: *Gazeta Wyborcza* (left-centre), *Rzeczpospolita* (right-wing), and *Nasz Dziennik* (radically right-wing). The same criterion was used to select three weekly magazines: *Polityka* (formerly left-wing, currently left-centre), *Wprost* (right-centre, with Tomasz Lis as editor-in-chief at that time), and *Uważam rze* (right-wing). Previous studies (Stępińska, 2011) showed that these media organizations differ not only in political orientation, but also in editorial policy. Additionally, we studied the content of *Fakt* – a daily tabloid with the highest circulation among Polish daily newspapers. The total number of items was 767. Table 1 presents numbers of items from all news organizations under the study.

Table 1

Sample

Media	Number of items
<i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i>	216
<i>Rzeczpospolita</i>	246
<i>Nasz Dziennik</i>	143
<i>Fakt</i>	61
<i>Polityka</i>	38
<i>Wprost</i>	26
<i>Uważam rze</i>	37
Total	767

Findings

Prominence of the theme

As Table 1 shows, *Rzeczpospolita* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* published more than 200 items devoted to the topic of the Polish EU presidency, while *Nasz Dziennik* (the anti-governmental, right-wing daily newspaper) – 143 items. At the same time, the daily tabloid published 61 items, which is almost twice as many as the weekly magazines published in the three six-week periods. In other words, *Gazeta Wyborcza* published on average twelve items per week, *Rzeczpospolita* fourteen items, while *Fakt* only four. Regarding the overall news coverage of Poland, we identified several high peaks in the Polish news media sample. The highest number of items published in all newspapers was identified on July 1 and 2, 2011. On these days *Gazeta Wyborcza* published, respectively eleven and eight items per day. *Rzeczpospolita* published twelve items on July 1 and eight items on July 4. On June 30, one day before officially taking over the presidency, *Gazeta Wyborcza* introduced the topic with five items, while *Rzeczpospolita* – with seven items. *Nasz Dziennik* devoted four items on July 1, while *Fakt* – three items on July 1, and four items on July 4. In each case the peak lasted around one week, till July 9. Weekly magazines published the highest number of items per issue in the first or second week of the presidency period. *Polityka* published four items on July 6, while *Wprost* and *Uważam rze* – seven and five items respectively, in the second week.

The next high peaks were identified in the following months, although there was no clear pattern across the news media. For example, in *Gazeta Wyborcza* as many as six items per day were published on August 31 and September 19. In *Rzeczpospolita* the next high peak was on September 26–29 (six-seven items per day). In *Nasz Dziennik* the highest number of items published one day was four (on December 16), and then three (on four days: July 21, August 25, September 29, and December 16). Finally, in *Fakt* no more than three items were published on one day (this happened on July 21–22 and July 29).

However, the absolute numerical count alone as well as the respective percentages of the news items devoted to the topic of the presidency do not provide a complete picture of the attention paid by the news media to this theme. It was therefore we decided to include the items' placement in the newspapers. Table 2 presents findings regarding the placement of the items devoted to the topic of the presidency in the newspaper. We distinguished between three main options: (1) the item is presented on the front page, (2) the item is introduced on the front page and continued on one of the following pages, or (3) the item is presented on a page other than the front one.

Table 2

Front page

Media	Front page	Frequency (%)
<i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i>	yes	3.7
	front page and continue	14.4
	no	81.9
<i>Rzeczpospolita</i>	yes	22
	front page and continue	24.3
	no	53.7
<i>Nasz Dziennik</i>	yes	1.4
	front page and continue	16.1
	no	82.5
<i>Fakt</i>	yes	13.1
	no	86.9
<i>Polityka</i>	front page and continue	2.6
	no	97.4
<i>Wprost</i>	front page and continue	26.9
	no	73.1
<i>Uważam rze</i>	no	100.0

Only a small number of items was published on the front page. The exception from that general trend is *Rzeczpospolita* with 22 percent of the items published on the front page, and more than 24 percent of items introduced on the front page and continued on following pages. Interestingly, the tabloid *Fakt*, which devoted a relatively small number of items (61) to the topic of the presidency, presented 13 percent of them on the front page.

One may notice significant differences between the weekly magazines, which usually introduce interesting and important topics on their cover pages. While *Wprost* introduced more than one quarter of their items about the Polish presidency on the front page, the two other weekly magazines decided to hardly do it (*Polityka*), or not do it at all (*Uważam rze*).

We distinguished between twelve main topic categories. Among all the items which covered the main theme, almost 35 percent were devoted to international politics, including relations between the EU and Poland, and between Poland and other countries. However, almost 22 percent of the items presented the EU presidency in the framework of domestic politics. Interestingly, the Polish press paid relatively a lot of attention to cultural events organized during the Polish EU presidency. In fact, they were covered even more frequently than the economic crisis, which was the major problem of EU countries at that time. Table 3 shows that these four topics were predominant in the Polish media coverage of the Polish EU presidency: altogether they are covered in 89 percent of the items.

Table 3

Main topics in Polish newspapers (N = 767)

Topic	Frequency	Percent
International politics	266	34.7
Internal politics	167	21.8
Culture	128	16.7
Economy	212	15.8
Social relations	20	2.6
Human interest	17	2.2
Justice and crime	11	1.4
Military and defense	8	1.0
Science and technology	8	1.0
Environment	7	0.9
Sport	2	0.3
Accidents and disasters	2	0.3
Other	10	1.3
Total	767	100.0

Media roles

Altogether, the majority of the items was focused on describing events (new and reports). In *Rzeczpospolita* as many as 54 percent of all the items were news, while in *Nasz Dziennik* – 43 percent, and in *Gazeta Wyborcza* – 37.5 percent. At the same time, the newspapers published reportages significantly less frequently. However, the only daily newspaper in our sample which published no reports at all was the tabloid *Fakt*. This newspaper provided mostly news (39 percent).

Besides providing descriptions of events, all the Polish daily newspapers in the study provided commentary and reviews. In *Fakt* almost one quarter of all the items (24.6 percent) represented that genre, while in *Gazeta Wyborcza* – almost 22 percent, in *Rzeczpospolita* – 14.6 percent, and in *Nasz Dziennik* – around 6 percent. Not surprisingly, this genre was most frequently used in the weekly magazines – *Polityka*, *Wprost*, and *Uważam rze* (57.9 percent, 42.3 percent, and 67.6 percent, respectively). Still, in *Polityka* around 20 percent of the items were news items. Nevertheless, the news organizations also used columns to provide the opinions and comments of journalists and editors.

Both daily newspapers and weekly magazines devoted more than 10 percent of the items to interviews. At the same time, journalists only rarely let the guest contributors present their opinions. In most of the news organizations in the study there were fewer than 7 percent of items of this genre. The only exception was *Nasz Dziennik*, where 17.5 percent of the items were actually written by guest contributors.

Table 4

Genres

Media	Genre	Frequency (%)
1	2	3
<i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i>	news	37.5
	reportage	13.4
	column	3.7
	news commentary, review	21.8
	guest contribution	6.9
	interview	13.9
	other	2.8

1	2	3
<i>Rzeczpospolita</i>	news	53.7
	reportage	7.7
	column	8.5
	news commentary, review	14.6
	guest contribution	3.7
	interview	11.4
	letter-to-editor	0.4
	other	0.0
<i>Nasz Dziennik</i>	news	42.7
	reportage	6.3
	column	13.3
	news commentary, review	6.3
	guest contribution	17.5
	interview	11.9
	letter to editor	1.4
	other	0.7
<i>Fakt</i>	news	39.3
	column	1.6
	interview	19.7
	news commentary, review	24.6
	guest contribution	3.3
	interview	9.8
	other	1.6
<i>Polityka</i>	news	21.1
	reportage	2.6
	column	7.9
	news commentary, review	57.9
	interview	5.2
	online discussion	2.6
	other	2.6
<i>Wprost</i>	news	11.5
	reportage	3.8
	column	11.5
	news commentary, review	42.3
	interview	23.1
	other	7.7

1	2	3
<i>Uważam rze</i>	reportage	5.4
	editorial	5.4
	column	5.4
	news commentary, review	67.6
	interview	13.5
	other	2.7

The findings collected in Table 5 show that most of the items covering the topic of the Polish EU presidency were written by staff members working in the office, while only a small amount of items was written by correspondents based in Brussels. As a result, the focus, as well as the perspective used in the media coverage was mostly domestic. Nevertheless, in *Rzeczpospolita* more than 20 percent of the items were actually prepared by journalists working abroad, while in *Gazeta Wyborcza* 17 percent of the items were prepared by correspondents. At the same time, all three weekly magazines in the study delivered items written exclusively by staff members.

Table 5

Author of the news

Media	Author of the news	Frequency (%)
<i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i>	correspondent	17.0
	staff member	73.2
	other	9.8
<i>Rzeczpospolita</i>	correspondent	21.1
	staff member	62
	other	16.9
<i>Nasz Dziennik</i>	correspondent	5.8
	staff member	92.8
	other	1.4
<i>Fakt</i>	staff member	95.2
	other	4.8
<i>Polityka</i>	staff member	100.0
<i>Wprost</i>	staff member	100.0
<i>Uważam rze</i>	staff member	100.0

Since a significant number of the items presented opinions, comments and reviews, we decided to check who had an opportunity to present their points

of view. Interestingly, as the findings collected in Table 6 show, journalists and reporters were authors of almost half of the opinion items published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* (43.7 percent) and *Rzeczpospolita* (42.7 percent). In all the weekly magazines the numbers were even higher: 83.3 percent in *Polityka*, 68.6 percent in *Uważam rze*, and 52.4 percent in *Wprost*. Media organizations invited external sources of opinion less frequently.

Although the topic required a deep knowledge of both domestic and foreign politics, as well as international relations and EU policy, experts' opinions were in some media presented even less frequently than politicians' opinions. For example, in *Gazeta Wyborcza* 31 percent of the opinion items included comments expressed by either a national or foreign politician, while only half this number (16%) presented experts' opinions. A similar tendency could be observed in *Rzeczpospolita*, although in that case national experts were interviewed (or invited to write their own text) more frequently, namely in 21 percent of the items. *Rzeczpospolita*, *Nasz Dziennik*, *Fakt* and all the weekly magazines hardly ever or never published items by a foreign expert.

At the same time, national politicians were often invited by some of the media organizations to present their opinions. In *Fakt* one third of all authors of opinions were national politicians (and neither foreign politicians, nor foreign experts), in *Nasz Dziennik* and *Gazeta Wyborcza* this was more than 20 percent, while *Polityka* and *Wprost* did not publish any text exclusively presenting the opinions of any Polish politicians.

It is worth mentioning that national authors' (politicians' and experts') opinions were presented significantly less frequently. For example, in *Nasz Dziennik*, where 29 percent of opinions were expressed by national experts, only 1 percent of the authors of comments were foreign experts. Even in high quality daily newspapers, such as *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*, foreign experts were authors of as few as 3.9 and 1.9 percent of the opinion items, respectively.

Table 6

Author of opinion

Media	Author of opinion	Frequency (%)
1	2	3
<i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i>	editorial staff	5.8
	journalist, reporter	43.7
	national politician	20.4

1	2	3
	foreign politician	10.7
	national expert	12.6
	foreign expert	3.9
	other	2.9
<i>Rzeczpospolita</i>	editorial staff	3.9
	journalist, reporter	42.7
	national politician	16.5
	foreign politician	7.8
	national expert	21.4
	foreign expert	1.9
	citizen	2.9
	other	2.9
<i>Nasz Dziennik</i>	editorial staff	2.7
	journalist, reporter	30.7
	national politician	24.0
	foreign politician	1.3
	national expert	29.3
	foreign expert	1.3
	other	10.7
<i>Fakt</i>	journalist, reporter	50.0
	national politician	30.0
	national expert	10.0
	other	20.0
<i>Polityka</i>	editorial staff	6.7
	journalist, reporter	83.3
	national expert	6.7
	citizen	3.3
<i>Wprost</i>	journalist, reporter	52.4
	national expert	42.9
	other	4.8
<i>Uważam rze</i>	editorial staff	5.7
	journalist, reporter	68.6
	national politician	2.9
	national expert	17.1
	foreign expert	2.9
	other	2.9

Evaluation of Poland's performance during the presidency

We assumed that the coverage would be politically biased and we would be able to identify this bias while studying the way newspapers evaluated Poland's performance during the presidency. Indeed, the newspapers with an anti-government orientation provided more negative evaluations of the presidency. Namely, in *Nasz Dziennik* one third of all materials included some critique of the government and its performance, and in *Uważam rze* more than half of the items expressed a negative evaluation. It is worth mentioning that *Fakt* was also highly critical (36.1 percent of items), but in this case the tabloid profile of the newspaper may be a reason for focusing mostly on negative events or aspects of particular issues.

At the same time, the two weekly magazines, *Polityka* and *Wprost*, presented a rather positive image of the Polish EU presidency. In *Wprost* almost a half of all items including an evaluation provided a positive opinion, while in *Polityka* one third of the evaluations was positive. The most balanced picture of the Polish EU presidency was drawn by *Gazeta Wyborcza*, where 67 percent of the items were neutral in their evaluation of Poland's performance (see Table 7). Surprisingly, *Rzeczpospolita*, despite its political orientation, provided a rather balanced image of Poland's performance (with one third positive evaluations, 13 percent negative, and 48 percent neutral ones). In 2011, both *Rzeczpospolita* and *Uważam rze* were owned by the same owner (G. Hajdarowicz), but *Uważam rze* hired more radically right-wing, anti-government publicists (who actually left *Rzeczpospolita* to launch the new magazine – *Uważam rze* in 2011).

Table 7

Evaluation of Poland's performance during the presidency

Media	Evaluation	Frequency (%)
1	2	3
<i>Gazeta Wyborcza</i>	positive	22.5
	negative	3.3
	positive and negative	7.2
	neutral	67.0
<i>Rzeczpospolita</i>	positive	32.9
	negative	13.4
	positive and negative	5.7
	neutral	48.0

1	2	3
<i>Nasz Dziennik</i>	positive	9.1
	negative	32.3
	positive and negative	12.1
	neutral	46.5
<i>Fakt</i>	positive	6.6
	negative	36.1
	positive and negative	0.0
	neutral	57.4
<i>Polityka</i>	positive	34.2
	negative	5.3
	positive and negative	7.9
	neutral	52.6
<i>Wprost</i>	positive	46.2
	negative	11.5
	positive and negative	7.7
	neutral	34.6
<i>Uważam rze</i>	positive	5.4
	negative	54.1
	positive and negative	5.4
	neutral	35.1

Conclusions

The quantitative analysis of the findings showed that although the Polish printed press reported the first Polish EU presidency, the topic's prominence was not very high. It is worth emphasizing that the findings of our study are consistent with the ones received by scholars from Silesia University who conducted a similar project (Kolczyński, 2013). In general, media organizations rather rarely presented the topic on the front page and they did not adapt their regular editorial policy to the new theme. Most of the news items, as well as opinions and comments, were written by staff members. Furthermore, journalists seemed to be more interested in the opinions of national politicians than either national or foreign experts. As a result, the framework of the coverage was predominantly domestic. Journalists working for daily newspapers focused mostly on providing news and their own interpretations of the reported events. On the contrary, weekly magazines provided comments and interviews, but again, most of

the opinions were expressed by journalists and editors, rather than experts. Finally, the evaluation of Poland's performance (or, in fact, the government's performance) revealed and confirmed the political orientation and bias of the media organizations. The theme of the EU presidency seemed rather to be another opportunity to report domestic politics, than explain EU policy to the readers.

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the findings of a quantitative content analysis of the Polish print media. Sharing the codebook and procedures with an international team, we were able to gain a broad perspective on the media coverage of the first Polish EU presidency. In particular, we focused on: (1) the number of items covering events related to the presidency, (2) the prominence of the topic, (3) genres, (4) main topics, (5) authors of news, (6) authors of opinions, and (7) the way Polish journalists evaluated Poland's performance during the EU presidency. The findings showed that although Polish print press reported the first Polish EU presidency, the topic's prominence was not very high. Media organizations rather rarely presented the topic on the front page and they did not change their regular editorial policy. Most of the news items, as well as opinions and comments, were written by staff members. Furthermore, journalists seemed to be more interested in the opinions of national poli-

ticians, rather than experts. As a result, the framework of the coverage was predominantly domestic. Journalists working for daily newspapers focused mostly on providing news and their own interpretations of the reported events. On the contrary, weekly magazines provided comments and interviews, but again, most of the opinions were expressed by their own journalists and editors.