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IS THERE A CHANCE FOR NON-PARTISAN MEDIA IN POLAND?

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Contributors	5
Introduction.....	6
1. Defining non-partisan media.....	12
2. The historical context.....	14
2.1. Short history of Polish journalism prior to 1989.....	14
2.2 1989: The creation of free media in Poland — the case of Gazeta Wyborcza.....	19
3. Politicians take over — the case of public TV.....	25
4. Smolensk air crash — the push for partisanship.....	31
5. Journalists in Poland — proxies of political elites?.....	36
6. Conclusions — look ahead	43
Bibliography.....	47
Appendix: Questionnaire for the semi-structured interview.....	52

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A free press can, of course, be good or bad, but, most certainly without freedom, the press will never be anything but bad....¹

Albert Camus

Introduction

Since the collapse of communism in 1989 and the following systemic transformation to liberal democracy, the Polish media have undergone a radical change. In that process the press have served more as a political player rather than an objective observer. All governing parties have attempted to control and influence both private and public media outlets.

Since the 2005 elections, politicians and journalists have become increasingly locked into two competing camps on a political battleground largely dominated by two parties: Civic Platform (PO) and the Law and Justice Party (PiS). During Civic Platform's time in power between 2007 and 2015, the politicians attempted to dissolve Poland's media regulatory body prematurely — it maintained soft control over the public broadcasters — and in the most drastic example, police raided *Wprost* weekly headquarters after the magazine published secretly-recorded, compromising conversations between Civic Platform politicians. All of this was part of the power struggle between the press, the opposition and the government in post-1989 Poland.

Since the 2010 plane crash in which the late president Lech Kaczyński and members of key state institutions died in Smolensk (Russia), the Polish media landscape has been subject to another vast change and reform, resulting in unprecedented levels of polarisation, divisions and animosity among politicians and press.

The parliamentary victory of the right-wing Law and Justice party in October 2015 has brought a new push for a fundamental change in the media landscape. The ruling party led by Jarosław Kaczyński, the twin brother of Lech, went ahead through the parliament with amendments to the media bill, taking full control over the state broadcasters² and

¹ Camus, A., (1960) *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*.

² BBC (2016) 'Polish media laws: Government takes control of state media', 7 January 2016; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-35257105>

promised a shift from public to “national” media.³ The scale, depth and ambition to reshape the media system alongside the broader change in judiciary and the way civil society functions have brought widespread international criticism of Poland from liberal press and international institutions.

The media legislation and its rapid passing have raised concerns in Brussels, where European Union officials have begun an official investigation into what they see as a blow to pluralism and press freedom.⁴ Poland’s ranking fell from 18th in 2015 to 47th in 2016 and 54th in 2017 in the Press Freedom Index run by Reporters Without Borders, which points out that media freedom and pluralism are in jeopardy.⁵ In 2017, for the first time since 1990, Freedom House degraded Poland’s status from ‘free’ press to ‘partly free’.⁶

The ruling party’s argument is that Polish media have been neither pluralist nor free and independent from political and foreign influence, and their coverage has lacked a right-wing perspective.⁷ So, in order to implement changes and run the country, the government needs an outlet to send its message to the people and restore the patriotic values and national pride deprived of its place by its predecessors. The opposition argues that the government uses state media to keep its grip on power, control the populist message and redefine the history of modern Poland for current political ends.⁸ Media are but one of many spheres of Poland’s social life that have come under new legislation. And its healthy condition is one of the foundations of a properly functioning democratic process.

³ Polskie Radio (2016), ‘National media bill’ to be announced soon, 5 January 2016; <http://www.thenews.pl/1/9/Artykul/235429,'National-media-bill'-to-be-announced-soon>

⁴The Guardian (2016) ‘European Commission to debate Poland’s controversial new laws’ 12 January 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/12/european-commission-to-debate-polands-controversial-new-laws>

⁵ Reporters without Borders (2016). World Press Freedom Index. In 2002 Poland occupied 29 place, in 2006 it was 58, between 2011 and 2012 it was ranked 24, and in 2013 it was 22. <https://rsf.org/en/poland>

⁶ Freedom House (2017), Freedom of the Press 2017, <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2017/poland>

⁷ Dziennik Gazeta Prawna (2016) ‘PiS o projekcie ustawy medialnej: Dobra zmiana, która odda media Polakom’, (PiS about the media bill proposa: Good change will hand back media to Poles’), 28 April 2016; <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/polityka/artykuly/519316,pis-o-projekcie-ustawy-medialnej-dobra-zmiana-ktora-odda-media-polakom.html>

⁸ Gazeta Wyborcza (2016) ‘Wielka czystka w mediach publicznych? Jest projekt ustawy o "mediach narodowych"' ('Public service media cleansing? The draft law on “national media” is ready’), 5 January 2016; <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75478,19428690,wielka-czystka-w-mediach-publicznych-jest-projekt-ustawy-o.html>

I believe this research paper can shed some light on societies governed by conservative or illiberal governments and their relations with the media as some patterns and behaviours around the world share similarities to the Polish case — though of course an extrapolation of the Polish story onto any other country has to take into consideration the specific context and relevant local landscape. Yet the polarisation, increasing partisanship, politicisation and the rollback of liberal democracy constitute a set of new common features across significant parts of the Western world.

Strong politicians undermine the credibility of the conventional media not only in Poland but in Hungary, Turkey, USA and many other places. Donald Trump's attacks on domestic and international liberal press resemble the Law and Justice politicians' criticism of liberal outlets in Poland. The polarisation among journalists in the US, for example the liberal *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *CNN* versus conservative *The Fox News* or *Breitbart News*, is visible in Poland too and increases by the day; facts are lost to partisan opinion and political bias influences the message.

As the Law and Justice government hints at a possibility of renationalising some private media in Poland⁹ — those mainly founded with foreign capital — this has already been taking place in Hungary since the Fidesz party came to power in 2010. The largest independent left-leaning newspaper *Népszabadság* was closed in 2016 and acquired by a firm linked to an ally of Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister. Newspapers, television networks and radio stations critical of the government have been purchased by businessmen loyal to the government.¹⁰

Hungarian public media *MTVA* favour the governing party and help to discredit political opposition. Both Polish and Hungarian governments use selective public advertisements

⁹ Niezależna.pl (2016), 'Czas na repolonizację. Koniec z niemiecką dominacją w mediach.' ('Time for repolonization. The end of German domination in media'), 20 October 2016; <http://niezalezna.pl/87865-czas-na-repolonizacje-koniec-z-niemiecka-dominacja-w-mediach>

¹⁰ The Budapest Beacon (2017), 'Politics has taken over Hungarian media', 8 February 2017; <http://budapestbeacon.com/featured-articles/politics-taken-hungarian-media/44419>

as a disciplining tool in controlling the media. Dependency on state funds for many outlets means a choice between loyalty to the governing party and survival or challenging its position and financial hardship.

The core feature of a healthy democracy — fair and free elections — increasingly are being decided on the internet. Traditional media have lost their privileged position and are desperately looking for an alternative business model. Simultaneously, their credibility comes under attack from populist politicians as social media gain strength and impact on society.

The question about the roles of political bias and partisanship in journalism has become important to the future of liberal democracy. Some professionals, such as Melissa Bell from Vox media, already see objective journalism to *“be a hollow aim for too long”* and suggest replacing it with advocacy journalism. In the age of the internet she argues objectivity is no longer achievable, and engagement, clear world-views and political standing make up for a more transparent and honest media landscape.¹¹

While private media are entitled to be partisan when it comes to opinions, they used to understand that it was in their best interest to deliver reliable and non-partisan factual reporting. Not anymore. Business models today favour advocacy and engagement as legacy media come under pressure from social media. On the other hand, public media — especially well established in Europe — have been expected, at least in liberal democracies, to maintain the balance of opinions and to get the facts straight. As public service media are obliged by law to maintain neutrality, reality shows how much they come under pressure from politicians eager to control the information flows.

In this paper, I examine the impact of the current political conflict on the shape of the media in Poland and its youthful democracy and attempt to answer the question: is there a chance for a non-partisan media in Poland? In the first chapter I provide definitions of partisanship that I test against the Polish case in the final conclusions of this paper.

¹¹ Bell, Mellisa (2017), ‘The Reuters Memorial Lecture: We Broke The News. How Do We Fix It?’, 10 February 2017; <http://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/video-reuters-memorial-lecture—we-broke-news-how-do-we-fix-it>

Before I do this however, I discuss the historical context of the press creation in the second chapter to help to explain the current divisions among the journalistic community. I argue that, as Poland remained under foreign influence for most of the 19th and 20th centuries, political bias and partisanship of many Polish journalists lie deeply embedded in the profession's tradition.

In this chapter, I also attempt to trace as closely as possible the first commitments to a free press after the collapse of communism in 1989. I investigate the origins and early days of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the first independent and free newspaper in the post-communist setting created by dissidents.

In the third chapter, I look at the state television transformation after 1989. Many heads of the Polish TV (*TVP*) and Radio (*Polskie Radio*) have claimed to build the equivalent of the *British Broadcasting Corporation*. I look at how successful they have been.

In the fourth chapter, I attempt to see whether a plane crash in which the late president Lech Kaczyński and many others from Poland's governing and military class died in 2010 in Smolensk, Russia, provoked a vast transformation of the media landscape or became an accelerator for the bigger change that had been brewing. In the post-Smolensk crash reality, right-wing publications, television and radio stations have begun to rise to prominence leading to polarisation, more pluralism and political partisanship of the media outlets.

In the fifth chapter, I analyse the close relations between politicians and journalists with many individuals blurring the lines between the two professions. The current political, almost tribal, divisions mirror the Polish tradition of politically-engaged journalism. I take a closer look at new forms of journalistic engagement that have emerged in the form of so-called "dziennikarstwo tożsamościowe" or "journalism of identity", offering narratives that lock its readers into the echo chambers of their own views.

In the final chapter, I attempt to assess the level of partisanship and look ahead to assess the chances of Polish journalists agreeing a common set of rules to avoid heavy politicisation of their profession. I look, too, at how Poland has tried to adopt the Anglo-American liberal press model and at how far that has proven impossible.

In order to better understand the situation of the Polish media, I carried out an in-depth reading of the relevant historical and historiographical literature. This ranged from history monographs to newspapers from the relevant period, archival sources such as Round Table talks on the media and specialist works on Polish media.

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with Polish leading journalists, editors-in-chief, media practitioners and media scientists. The quotes in the text are from interviews carried out by the author in the period between November 2016 and February 2017 unless otherwise indicated. The broad area of questioning for these interviews is noted in the Appendix.

1. Defining non-partisan media

A simple definition of non-partisan media could mean “Not biased or partisan, especially towards any particular political group.”¹² However, Blumler and Gurevitch classified mass media partisanship into five categories:

1. The highest degree of partisan involvement exists when the parties are directly associated with the running of media enterprises via ownership, provision of financial subsidy or membership on management and editorial boards.
2. Next, there is a condition of voluntary fixed partisanship, where, short of any structural connection of the parties to the media, a party may count on the unconditional and unswerving loyalty of a particular organ.
3. A third level reflects a more qualified brand of partisanship, where a medium may usually back a favoured party but where the support tends to be conditioned by the expression of numerous qualifications, hesitations and references to party shortcomings as well as by a readiness to see some merit in the policies of opposing parties (including even an occasional refusal to proffer the customary election endorsement).
4. Fourth, there is an ad hoc and in a sense unpredictable form of partisanship, where the political stance of a medium is determined afresh according to the merits of the case perceived as decisive each time a need to declare a preference arises.
5. Finally, there is a condition of non-partisanship in which a communication outlet may not take sides and strives at all cost to maintain its political neutrality, as exemplified by those broadcasting organisations that are obliged by law or charter to refrain from openly supporting any political position.”¹³

This paper will apply the Blumler and Gurevitch classification to the Polish media landscape and see if this can help with the understanding of partisanship and politicisation of Polish journalism.

¹² Oxford Dictionaries (2016); <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/non-partisan>

¹³ Blumler, Jay, and Gurevitch, Michael. (1995: 64-5) *Communication and Society: The Crisis of Public Communication* (1). Florence, US: Routledge, 2002.

I also want to see how the Polish changing media landscape fits these categories and how much it has changed after the Smolensk crash and 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections. In this context I will look how “media tożsamościowe” or the media of identity push for partisanship and bias and fit into a world trend of media polarisation.

More broadly, this Polish case study can contribute to our understanding of the processes of new media environment creation in other countries liberated from oppressive regimes and the long term consequences of the very initial commitments to free press in the moment of transition for political life and the health of the democratic process.

2. The historical context

2. 1. Short history of Polish journalism prior to 1989

Polish free media are relatively young, and in this chapter I will use a very brief historical sketch to help our understanding of the specific context. When the mass press developed in the 19th century in Western Europe, Poland was partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austria (between 1795 and 1918). Polish journalists and writers became representatives of the national interest and national culture. Most of them fled the repressive Russian part of former Poland and operated either in the less oppressive Austrian occupied territory or in France or USA addressing Polish emigrants mainly on the subject of the statehood prospects.¹⁴ When that materialised for a short period between the World wars, Poland saw a rapid development of many political parties paralleled officially and unofficially by a heavily politicised, free, partisan and pluralist press.¹⁵

Between 1918 and 1939 the largest publisher was the Catholic Church with *Mały Dziennik* being its political voice. Political parties from the left to the right produced their own outlets promoting the party line. Nationalist views were represented by *Gazeta Warszawska*, conservative by *Rzeczpospolita*, liberal by *Kurier Polski*, socialist by *Robotnik* to name just a few players in that diverse market.¹⁶ As a large part of Polish society was illiterate and the circulation was small in comparison with other European countries,¹⁷ the press was addressing mainly the political elite. Polish journalists — small in numbers¹⁸ — acted more like a politician-journalist or politician-editor, a concept well known to them from the times of partition. The press market was shaped by the Russian, German and Austrian oc-

¹⁴ Dobek-Ostrowska in *Communication, Society and Politics* by Hallin and Mancini (2012), p. 27.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Łojek, J., Władka, W., Myśliński, J. (1998) *Dzieje prasy polskiej*, ('The history of the Polish press'), Warszawa.

¹⁷ 9 copies per 100 inhabitants, the comparable figures were 38 in Great Britain and 27 in France in 1939 (Habielski, 1999: 75)

¹⁸ At the turn of the XX century there were about 1000 journalists, and about 3500 were employed in 1939. Habielski (2005)

cupiers' influence respectively. That seems to be the main reason why Polish journalism did not develop in a similar way to the Anglo-American liberal model of the press.¹⁹

During the Second World War occupation of Poland, Nazi Germany closed all pre-war newspapers and opened a few heavily censored titles. Polish radio was closed and possession of a radio receiver by Polish citizens was banned and punishable with death. Among the underground press the largest was *Biuletyn Informacyjny*²⁰ published by the Home Army and *Rzeczpospolita* by the Polish government in exile.

After the war the communists took full control of the media. The old guard of the pre-war Polish journalists were killed in the war, died or fled the country and were replaced by journalists recruited from the working class.²¹ Press and broadcasters were firmly in the hands of communist party appointed "nomenklatura" and censorship guaranteed the control of the content.²² The Stalinist period meant pushing the profession in favour of journalists acting as political propagandists rather than as independent agitators.²³ As Curry says:

The Party politburo influences and controls the media both through institutional channels and through informal, occasional, personal involvement on the part of its members. Institutional control occurs largely through the personnel selection process.²⁴

¹⁹ Hadamik Katharina (2005) - "Between East and West or Simply 'Made in Poland'? The many different styles of today's Polish journalism", in: Svennik Høyer and Horst Pöttker (Eds), *Diffusion of the News Paradigm 18502000*, Göteborg: NORDICOM, p. 211-26.

²⁰ *Biuletyn Informacyjny* circulation was 43 000 copies at peak times. Polish Home Army's publishing house was most likely the biggest underground publication enterprise in the world. Besides up to 1000 underground publication appeared in Poland during the The Second World War with an average circulation of 5000 copies. Salmonowicz S., *Polskie Państwo Podziemne*, Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Szkolne i Pedagogiczne, 1994

²¹ Curry, Jane Leftwich (1990) — *Poland's journalists: professionalism and politics*, Cambridge University Press 1990, p. 5.

²² Censorship in communist Poland (PRL) was a system of media control undertaken between 1946 and 1990 by the Polish Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows (Główny Urząd Kontroli Prasy, Publikacji i Widowisk).

²³ Curry, Jane Leftwich (1990), p. 5.

²⁴ Curry, Jane Leftwich, Johnson, A. Ross — *The Media and Intra-Elite Communication in Poland*, Summary Report, The Rand Publications, 1980. p. VIII and 17.

Among the largest communist newspapers were the official Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) outlets *Trybuna Ludu*, *Żołnierz Wolności* or *Życie Warszawy*, a socialist youth paper *Sztandar Młodych*, a late afternoon tabloid *Express Wieczorny* and the unofficial governmental voice *Rzeczpospolita*, created in 1982.

As an exception to the normal practice in the communist bloc, about 10% of the press in Poland was private and there were some fairly independent publications — operating under the censorship legal framework — of which some were linked to the Catholic Church like *Tygodnik Powszechny*.²⁵ But importantly and in opposition to the state controlled and heavily censored media, a group of politically engaged journalist-writers gradually rose to prominence developing an underground press. In the 1970s they became the backbone of the opposition movement; Tadeusz Mazowiecki (*Więź*, *Tygodnik Solidarność*), Jan Olszewski (*Po Prostu*), Seweryn Blumsztajn, Adam Michnik (*Biuletyn informacyjny*), Antoni Macierewicz (*Głos*), Helena Łucywo (*Tygodnik Mazowsze*).

Dissidents and editors of the underground and officially permitted critical publications acted in line with the Polish 19th century tradition of journalist-intellectuals fighting for a political cause. They represented a spectrum of political views (reaching out to Polish political thought between 1918 and 1939 and beyond) but were united by one common feature — anti-communism to a varied degree. And this influence of political leaders was highly visible as Curry noted:

Even on *Tygodnik Solidarność* events were not simply reported. Their coverage was planned to handle themes that the editor, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, and his co-workers felt should be covered as a result of formal and informal consultations with Wałęsa and other *Solidarność* leaders.²⁶

²⁵ Dobek-Ostrowska in *Communication, Society and Politics* by Hallin and Mancini (2012), p. 30.

²⁶ Curry, Jane Leftwich (1990), p. 112.

Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy, an editor-in-chief of Belsat TV was close to the dissident movement through her parents' involvement in *Solidarność* and saw vividly challenges lying ahead for the journalistic profession.

The problem was that this independent journalism was engaged in politics, which was a way of making politics – this active opposition against the communist state.

Bartosz Węglarczyk was young in the 80's and his attitude was anti-communist. He was helping to distribute *Tygodnik Solidarność* at the time:

Tygodnik Solidarność was a very well done information newspaper and it contained true information. [...] But it also was a bulletin of an organization, a party bulletin of the social and political movement of *Solidarność*. These people later entered the media in Free Poland and they didn't become journalists overnight.

During the communist era, Polish journalists maintained a high level of self-definition as professionals and a sense of loyalty to their profession.²⁷ Unlike in the West there had been no serious debate about the principles of independent journalism; rather it was a debate about self-liberation and free-expression of journalists representing often conflicting and ever changing agendas depending on the current political context. As Curry observed:

....the world of Polish politics is the most tumultuous and unstable in Eastern Europe. It is a political situation into which journalists are constantly drawn. The demands on them, though, are never consistent. This makes them periodically rethink their personal and professional ideals and affiliations.²⁸

The official press like *Trybuna Ludu* or state broadcasters *Polskie Radio* and *Telewizja Polska* gradually gave way to more liberal views largely reflecting divisions within the communist party between hard-liners and moderates. Curry again:

²⁷ Curry, Jane Leftwich (1990), p. 23.

²⁸ Curry, Jane Leftwich (1990), p. 24.

Informal and personal ties between journalists and editors, on the one hand, and officials and leaders, on the other, remain a feature of the Polish media system.²⁹

The blending of the roles between a politician and a journalist became increasingly visible when a long time editor-in-chief of the most influential communist *Polityka* weekly magazine Mieczysław Rakowski became the last first secretary of the United Polish Worker's Party.

Forty-five years of communist rule replaced the old pre-1939 politically engaged and pluralist media system with a soviet press model with a liberal twist. Unlike in other countries of the soviet bloc by the end of the 1980s, there were a few groups of journalists in Poland with experience in underground and officially sanctioned publications. They were the people who laid the foundations for the post-1989 liberal democracy and media landscape.

The degree of partisanship of the press in Poland tested against the Blumler and Gurevitch scale reaches the highest level. Between 1918 and 1939 most of the press outlets were directly owned by political parties and served their interest. During the Second World War most of the press was run by the Polish underground state and again represented the highest level of partisanship. And, during communism state broadcasters and majority of newspapers and magazines were state enterprises controlled by the state and the ruling party apparatus.

²⁹ Ibid.

2.2 1989: The creation of free media in Poland — the case of *Gazeta Wyborcza*

May 8, 1989, after decades of communist rule in Poland, was a day that changed Polish media forever. 150,000 copies of an 8-page newspaper named *Gazeta Wyborcza* hit the kiosks across the country. The first editorially independent newspaper after the long years of communist rule was born. *Gazeta Wyborcza* was a by-product of the Polish Round Table talks initiated by the communist government with the *Solidarność* trade union and other opposition groups in an attempt to defuse growing social unrest. During the negotiations the communist government agreed to legalise independent trade unions (*Solidarność* among them), introduce the office of the president that would limit the communist secretary's power and a formation of *Senat*, the higher chamber of the parliament. It also agreed to hold the first partially free elections on June 4, 1989 and the opposition got a right to its own legal publication. The title was *Gazeta Wyborcza* (The Election Gazette) and the communist party promised to provide paper — then in short supply as well as a printing press. *Solidarność*'s leader Lech Wałęsa appointed Adam Michnik — one of the leading figures of the anti-communist opposition movement — as the editor-in-chief. To build a successful publication in the short time before the elections, he reached out to Helena Łuczywo³⁰ and the underground weekly *Tygodnik Mazowsze* staff. Bartosz Węglarczyk, one of the first young journalists who got a job with *Gazeta Wyborcza* remembers the times of underground press:

Tygodnik Mazowsze was the most professional underground newspaper in world history. Never before and never after had I seen an underground magazine which would be so professional in every way. They published more than 30,000 copies at their peak. It was professionally made with professional articles, proof-reading, without mistakes, good titles. It was amazing.

³⁰ Bartosz Węglarczyk interview on 10 January 2017.

Węglarczyk gives three reasons why it was so good: some of the editors were professional journalists: some had work experience with foreign media³¹; and some of them spoke foreign languages. This experience was crucial in the making of *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

When the communist party lost power, many, including a veteran Polish journalist Adam Szostkiewicz, saw the “role of *Gazeta Wyborcza* as crucial in a regime change” as it served as a “main platform for democratic and European values”.³² For Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy who came back to Poland from a fellowship in the US, *Gazeta Wyborcza* “was this newspaper that would tell everyone what to think.” This was the legacy of communist times and a moment of change. Revolutionaries were made editors in a new world but it was hard for them to abandon their convictions. It is obvious now, as Węglarczyk notes:

Gazeta Wyborcza was led by the journalists who were political and social activists. For the first years after communism it had numerous advantages, but what was an advantage at the beginnings of *Gazeta Wyborcza*’s existence later became a disadvantage — the fact that it was led by people who wanted to change Poland and not just do the newspaper.

Between 1989 and 1991, Adam Michnik served as an MP in the national parliament and at the same time carried on as the paper’s editor-in-chief. Węglarczyk remembers *Gazeta Wyborcza*’s influence on political life in Poland when Michnik’s editorial offered the position of the president to the communists and the PM’s job to the opposition.³³

To say that *Gazeta Wyborcza* was the source of knowledge revealed would not be an exaggeration. You started the day in Poland from the lecture of *Gazeta*’s leads, I mean “your President, our Premier” is the best example. When other newspapers wrote something it was important, but when *Gazeta Wyborcza* wrote it, it was 30 times more important. Not two times or ten times, but 30 times more important than anything else published in Poland.

³¹ *Tygodnik Mazowsze* editor-in-chief Helena Łuczywo was *The Daily Telegraph* correspondent between 1980 and 1981, and in 1986 she spent a year as a fellow of the Bunting Institute at Radcliffe College.

³² Adam Szostkiewicz answers emailed on 12 December 2016.

³³ In 1989 general Wojciech Jaruzelski became president, Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the PM.

Soon *Gazeta Wyborcza* changed from being a representative of the whole opposition to a newspaper reflecting views of their editorial board. Michnik recalls:

When it comes to the newspaper, we didn't want to be an agency of the *Solidarność*, but we wanted to be an element of this pluralistic and diverse movement. When we were looking at western newspapers I had in mind: *El Pais*, *Liberation* and *La Repubblica*. That was our model. That was our target, but we managed to create our own style which is different.

The former anti-communist opposition began to show diverse opinions on the course for Poland in the early days of transition. From the beginning of his journalistic/editorial endeavour Michnik maintained his ideological influence over the newspaper. '*I don't edit the paper*', he claimed in 1989, '*I'm rather a political commissar not the editor, my colleagues do the journalism*'.³⁴ Today Michnik looks back at that interview:

It was kind of a joke as I had nothing to do with journalism before. I had a different spot in the ranks; I was doing the political writing. But that was completely different. When I was appointed, *Solidarność* wasn't the ruling power. It was before the elections. It was the first institution they had, so they wanted to appoint somebody well-known, at least known at that time. They wanted somebody, who let's say that, was trusted by the leaders. I had very good relations with Wałęsa, so that's how they found me.

But the situation in Poland after the elections was fluid and allegiances were being formed anew. *Solidarność* movement was not a monolith and was riven by internal conflicts. Lech Wałęsa was collaborating with the members of the anti-communist opposition movement, twin brothers Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński. Supported by Adam Michnik Tadeusz Mazowiecki was elevated to a PM job and he left a vacancy at *Tygodnik Solidarność*, a beacon of *Solidarność* underground press. In a war of *Solidarność* factions Lech Wałęsa gave the symbolic and influential weekly to a political ally. That was Jarosław Kaczyński, today the head of the Law and Justice party who told the editorial staff upon his appointment as an editor-in-chief of *Tygodnik Solidarność*:

³⁴ Adam Michnik in an interview for '*Tygodnik Powszechny*', 10 December 1989

Solidarność lost “Gazeta Wyborcza” and can’t lose Tygodnik now. And the union members are worried just about that. Besides I have told you a lot and won’t say more because I am a politician and you are journalists thus over sensitive humans and I am a callous man. And that is the Solidarność trade union decision and there is no way back.³⁵

In order to calm down resistance of the staff writers Lech Wałęsa had to back Kaczyński up and explain his decision.

“I know one can say that the press should be independent. It is too early for that and for the time being this cannot be the case.”³⁶

In the 1990 presidential elections, the anti-communist opposition camp had two main contenders: Lech Wałęsa, a leader of the Solidarność trade union supported by the Kaczyński brothers, *Tygodnik Solidarność* and Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the first non-communist PM post-1989 backed by Adam Michnik and *Gazeta Wyborcza*. This was the beginning of the open split within the opposition movement that is still shaping today’s discourse. Polish politics are locked in the narratives of the Solidarność generation’s two camps.

The role of *Gazeta Wyborcza* has been debated in Poland since its creation. “*In 1989 everyone thought that Gazeta Wyborcza was the newspaper of the Solidarność movement*” says Krzysztof Skowroński who became a young journalist in the early years of free Poland. Today he heads the Polish Journalists’ Association and looks back at the very first editorially independent newspaper in post-communist bloc in a new light:

I used to treat it as a source of absolute truth. I read *Gazeta Wyborcza* and I thought that it was truth, truth, truth, and only truth because it was our newspaper and Solidarność, etc.

³⁵ Polityka (2016) ‘Kaczyński przejął, a nie stworzył „Tygodnik Solidarność”’. Prawdziwe świętowanie 35-lecia odbyło się bez niego’ (‘Kaczyński took over and not created “Tygodnik Solidarność”. True celebrations of the 35 anniversary took place without him’); <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/historia/1678634,1,kaczynski-przejal-a-nie-stworzyl-tygodnik-solidarnosc-prawdziwe-swietowanie-35-lecia-odbylo-sie-bez-niego.read>

³⁶ Wirtualne Media (2006) ‘Jarosław Kaczyński był redaktorem naczelnym’ (‘Jarosław Kaczyński was an editor-in-chief’) 10 March 2006; <http://www.wirtualnemedia.pl/artykul/jaroslaw-kaczynski-byl-redaktorem-naczelnym>

Suddenly it turned out to be different. Later *Gazeta* lost the *Solidarność* logo³⁷ and at that moment two different camps started to emerge. [...] We didn't know it then, but *Gazeta* monopolised the discourse by excluding social groups: the *Solidarność* movement and Lech Wałęsa, later conservative groups and *GW* become the centre of the liberal-social thought.

Some journalists like Jacek Karnowski from a conservative *wSieci* weekly see this change of the *Gazeta Wyborcza's* editorial line as seizure of the common good negotiated at the Polish Round Table.

They deceived many Poles claiming that they are the representatives of the entire post-*Solidarność* camp. *Gazeta Wyborcza* wanted to play a role of this national guard of values, political agenda, belonging to Europe, good, and decent. In that sense it played the dominant role and it was brutal. It was not enough for them to be the largest player. It wanted to govern, because only in times of informational monopoly they had a chance to succeed in performing these operations of mixing truth and lies, politics and journalism, mission and money-making in an intelligent and precise way.

In the post-1989 Poland the right wing and conservative newspapers could not compete with *Gazeta Wyborcza's* dominant role. For Bartosz Węglarczyk it 'was the only influential medium in Poland' despite other outlets existence.

You started a day by checking what *Gazeta Wyborcza* wrote and you finished your day guessing what they would write the next day.

For years *Gazeta Wyborcza* has been one of the most important players influencing Polish media landscape from the time of its inception. It has always been engaged in promoting liberal values, influencing political life and setting a moral standard for the country. Yet for conservative journalists it has been too much and they have built their media largely in opposition to *Gazeta Wyborcza*. They have questioned *Gazeta's* moral right — resulting from *Gazeta Wyborcza* journalists' political involvement in the anti-communist opposition — to set the narrative and judgment of the historical process of Poland's transformation.

³⁷ Stokes Gale, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down: The Collapse of Communism In Eastern Europe* (212), Oxford University Press, 1993.

At the end of 2016, *Gazeta Wyborcza* remained the largest broadsheet newspaper with the circulation of around 130,000 copies and 100,000 digital subscribers.³⁸ Yet the publishing company Agora announced cuts of nearly 10% of its staff and closure of all foreign correspondents posts and several regional departments. Adam Michnik claimed that financial difficulties are a direct result of the new government's actions. Since the Law and Justice party came to power in October 2015, advertisements from the state-run companies and public announcements have been withdrawn from the newspaper, and public administration offices have been urged to cancel subscriptions. 'This hit us hard on the pocket, they want to destroy us with the simplest of methods; when it is unclear what it is all about it is about money'³⁹ — said Michnik.

³⁸ Wirtualne Media (2017) '„Fakt” liderem, „Super Express” przed „Gazetą Wyborczą”, która straciła 17%.' ("Fakt" a leader, "Super Express ahead of "Gazeta Wyborcza" that lost 17%.), 3 February 2017; <http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/artykul/fakt-liderem-super-express-przed-gazeta-wyborcza-ktora-stracila-17-proc-sprzedaz-gazet-w-grudniu>

³⁹ Wirtualne Media (2016) 'Adam Michnik: zmiana władzy straszliwie walnęła "Gazetę Wyborczą" po kieszeni, nie stać nas na oddziały regionalne i korespondentów' (Adam Michnik: the change of government hit "Gazeta Wyborcza" very hard, we can't afford regional sections and correspondents), 23 November 2016; <http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/artykul/adam-michnik-zmiana-wladzy-straszliwie-walnela-gazete-wyborcza-po-kieszeni-nie-stac-nas-na-oddzialy-regionalne-i-korespondentow>

3. Politicians take over — the case of public TV.

You remember me as a tough politician. Because I used to be such a tough politician and I understand the world of media I am the guarantor and I will know how to protect the independence of public television from the threats from the world of politics.⁴⁰

Jacek Kurski, head of TVP, 8 January 2016

The relations between the state and the public broadcaster *TVP* have always been political in Poland. Until 1989, TV and radio were under the tight control of the communist party. The big change in the Polish media landscape came with the transition from the authoritarian system to democracy as in other post-communist states in Central Europe. In 1990 the media market was liberalised, the state broadcaster lost monopoly and private media began to operate. In the following years, television networks like *Polsat* and *TVN* were created.

The state *TVP* has seen a political rollercoaster with 20 people running the organisation over the last 27 years. The time of the regime change was overseen at the *TVP* by a former communist government spokesman Jerzy Urban. Heads kept on rolling depending on the political horse trading. Traditionally the top job has been filled by many politicians, MPs, government spokesmen or ministers. Jacek Kurski, the current head of the *TVP* has worked as a journalist, documentary filmmaker, MP, MEP and a deputy culture minister in the Law and Justice government prior to his appointment in January 2016. He was the first head of the *TVP* appointed directly by the government's Minister of Treasury⁴¹ after the new legislation regulating the media was introduced in 1992.

⁴⁰ Polskie Radio (2016), 'Jacek Kurski nowym prezesem TVP. Zapowiada przywrócenie standardów', (Jacek Kurski becomes a new head of TVP. Announces a return of the standards'), 8 January 2016; <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1567487,Jacek-Kurski-nowym-prezesem-TVP-Zapowiada-przywrocenie-standardow>

⁴¹ Polskie Radio (2016), 'Jacek Kurski nowym prezesem TVP. Zapowiada przywrócenie standardów', (Jacek Kurski becomes a new head of TVP. Announces a return of the standards'), 8 January 2016; <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1567487,Jacek-Kurski-nowym-prezesem-TVP-Zapowiada-przywrocenie-standardow>

A media bill of 1992 gave life to Krajowa Rada Radiofonii i Telewizji (KRRiTV), a state media regulator with a primary role as the guardian of freedom of speech, right to information and public interest. But its role has diminished with the Law and Justice double victory of presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015. The ruling party rushed through the parliament an amendment to the media bill. It took away from the KRRiTV the power to appoint heads of state broadcasters and ceded this right to the Minister of Treasure and later to a newly created parallel body under the name of Rada Mediów Narodowych (RMN)⁴² where Law and Justice are in full control. The RMN's main task is to overlook the change of the paradigm from the public to national media. Prof. Stanisław Mocek notes:

What is taking place in the public Polish radio and TV is the revolutionary change that aims at excluding journalists who don't fit to this model of national media.

Whenever the political pendulum has swung in post-1989 Poland, the state broadcasters have entered a period of staff exchange from the top to the bottom of the organisation. Since the Law and Justice party took full control of the state broadcasters, many journalists have been forced to leave or have handed in their resignation.⁴³ Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy, a candidate for a top job at the *TVP* in 2016 disagrees with the idea of the fighting public media:

The level of applying pressure is too high now [...] I don't like it and I think it will be counterproductive. [...] The public television is for all the citizens, even if it follows this or that direction. But "that" direction dominated for the last 25 years. But the fact that it dominated for 25 years doesn't mean that the new one has to be introduced with brute force.

But for journalists such as Jacek Karnowski who worked for the *TVP* as a political reporter and the head of a flagship news bulletin *Wiadomości*, the current shift in the public televi-

⁴² Rada Mediów Narodowych (Council of National Media) was formed in 2016. It is made of 3 politicians appointed by the parliament and 2 by the president at the biggest parliamentary clubs nomination. The body is primarily responsible for appointments of the heads and boards at the state broadcasters *TVP* and *Polskie Radio* and Polish Press Agency. http://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm8.nsf/page.xsp/rmn_regulamin

⁴³ Towarzystwo Dziennikarskie has created a list of journalists, so called victims of the "good change" in the Polish media and there are 228 people on it in March 2017. Source: <http://towarzystwodziennikarskie.org>

sion brings back pluralism in the state broadcaster and on the media market dominated by liberal media (*TVN, Polsat*) on a scale unseen under previous governments and is part of a much needed process of healing for the national broadcaster.

We need to see how deeply rooted the communist and post-communist staff in the public media is. Not only the faces, bosses, as these faces were frequently taken from the outside — e.g. a TV reporter. There is like thousands of people who are silently working in one direction and they stub, and they never let help to those who have been willing to help. When the right wing was governing the public media, everything was being destroyed, it was out of order, or it simply didn't work. When the left-wing party was ruling, or left-liberal formation, everything was fine.

Some journalists, among them Bartosz Węglarczyk, reject the expression 'public media' and argue 'state media' better defines the broadcasters heavily dependent on any ruling party in post-1989 Poland:

These have been the state media and it has been a decision of politicians if they have been more steerable or less. There were moments when they were more steerable than today or less. But it always depended on the good will and the moral values and ethics of the politicians.

Television is the most popular source of information for Poles. Three television groups dominate the news market: *TVN* and *TVN24* are watched by 71%, *TVP*, *TVP2* and *TVP Info* by 69%, *Polsat* and *Polsat News* - 66%.⁴⁴ Every time the government changes, the recruitment for new editorial staff begins at *TVP*. The selection process is based on how close journalists are to the politically engaged management rather than on professional experience. Over time, the political pendulum and the top-to-bottom staff changes have created considerable animosity between journalists and lack of trust between the professionals. It is almost impossible to keep one's job when the government changes. Maintenance of editorial independence therefore becomes impossible and the situation forces many journalists to choose between their own political allegiance, or that of their editors.

⁴⁴ Source of information for Poles: TV - 64% Internet - 21%, radio - 8%, press - 4%. CBOS (2017), 'Ocena wiarygodności telewizyjnych programów informacyjnych i publicystycznych', ('Evaluation of credibility of television news and news programmes'), 10 May 2017.

Adam Szostkiewicz observes that a chance to maintain editorial independence and non-partisan approach becomes smaller the lower the position of a journalist is within the state controlled media outlets:

The bottom line is that PiS controlled media is a part of the regime change from liberal to illiberal democracy. No objectivity is possible, allowed or permitted. This is a time of war.

Prof. Mocek takes a closer look at the editorial process of news creation under the head of the TVP Jacek Kurski:

There is no room for reliability or common sense. This is so evident and ruthless that it resembles the regime media. A journalist is clearly in favour of something, he has instructions ordering what can and cannot be said, how to interpret facts.

Government officials and Law and Justice party members are more likely to do interviews with state broadcasters than the members of the opposition.⁴⁵ For Prof. Stanisław Mocek the current situation is no surprise:

This is hypocritical to raise alarm that the public TV was non-partisan and now it supports PiS. It has always been repeated that the TV was a political prey. It was one of loot.

Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy has seen journalists of all political stripes getting close to politicians over the years. Today she points at the group of conservative journalists likely to be sympathetic to the ruling party:

Today there are these journalists who call themselves “disobedient”⁴⁶ and they may well be but not towards Kaczyński. Maybe they don’t have a close relationship with Kaczyński, as he is a man who doesn’t maintain a relationship with every journalist. But, in general, there is a group of journalists with whom he is in a good relation.

⁴⁵ Wirtualne Media (2016), 'W kanałach TVP połowa czasu wystąpień polityków dla PiS, mniej dla PO, dużo więcej dla rządu i prezydenta' ('In the TVP channels half of the time of politicians appearances for PIS, less for PO, much more for the government and the president'), 20 February 2016; <http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/artykul/w-kanalach-tvp-polowa-czasu-wystapien-politykow-dla-pis-mniej-dla-po-duzo-wiecej-dla-rzadu-i-prezydenta-analiza>

⁴⁶ Dziennikarze niepokorni (disobedient journalists) — right wing and conservative journalists who rejected liberal and left wing mainstream media. The most well known journalists are: Jan Pospieszalski, Piotr Zaremba, Jacek Karnowski, Michał Karnowski, Rafał Ziemkiewicz, Ewa Stankiewicz, Paweł Lisicki, Tomasz Sakiewicz, Krzysztof Skowroński, Bronisław Wildstein

Politicians and heads of state *TVP* have been calling for years for a BBC-style model for state broadcasters. This has proven impossible. The *BBC* is a constantly changing organisation with global aspirations and adequate funding in the form of a licence fee. Domestically it has resisted commercialisation, unlike the Polish equivalent where 60% of its funding depends on advertising revenue. The funding and thus control over the state broadcaster in Poland has been long a subject of a political debate. In 2008 Donald Tusk, the then Prime Minister said:

A radio and television licence fee is an archaic way of financing the public media, an exaction collected from people. Therefore, the government will seek the support of the president and the opposition for its abolition.⁴⁷

The work continues to find a new model of financing the state media as the licence fee collection dropped significantly after the Tusk's comments.

The level of legal and institutional insulation between journalists and politicians is non-existent in Poland. The *BBC* as an institution has a long tradition of independence while the new post-communist *TVP* is relatively young and ruled by politicians in post-1989 reality. The selection process for top jobs at *TVP* has been based on political obedience and connections under all governments in post-1989 history of Poland. The legacy of communism is still prevalent and visible.

Under the current head Jacek Kurski, the *TVP* news and current affairs programming have been dominated by the ruling party's message. Previous heads of the organisation too made sure no harm is done to their political protectors. The current shift of the paradigm from 'public' to 'national' is in the words of Jacek Kurski an attempt to rebuild a national community and "to become a medium, that knows how to unite Poles around great and sublime goals".⁴⁸ According to opinion polls, 64% (30% in 2012) of Poles see news in state

⁴⁷ Wprost (2017), 'Tusk - abonament rtv to haracz', ('Tusk - radio and tv licence fee is an exaction'), 29 April 2008; <https://www.wprost.pl/128832/Tusk-abonament-rtv-to-haracz>

⁴⁸ Polskie Radio (2016), 'Jacek Kurski nowym prezesem TVP. Zapowiada przywrócenie standardów', (Jacek Kurski becomes a new head of TVP. Announces a return of the standards'), 8 January 2016; <http://www.polskieradio.pl/5/3/Artykul/1567487,Jacek-Kurski-nowym-prezesem-TVP-Zapowiada-przywrocenie-standardow>

television as biased in favour of the government and only 21% (44% in 2012) see the programming as impartial.⁴⁹

The *TVP* is the largest television network in Poland with the biggest audience share and signal coverage. It is also the biggest employer on the audio-visual market, and in many regional cities, the only one. Overwhelmingly politicised over time, massively underfunded with licence fee collection on a record low level of 45%,⁵⁰ heavily relying on commercial advertisement with the top positions being filled with a new political appointees less than every two years on average⁵¹, the *TVP* has become a broadcaster with mixed visions and aspirations used by politicians as a tool.

⁴⁹ CBOS (2017), 'Ocena wiarygodności telewizyjnych programów informacyjnych i publicystycznych', ('Evaluation of credibility of television news and news programmes'), 10 May 2017.

⁵⁰ UK for comparison has a rate of 90%

⁵¹ Over the last 27 years only 2 heads of the *TVP* maintained their position for more than 2.5 years. Often heads were losing their job with months from the appointment and their position was a subject to negotiations of the political parties forming coalition governments.

4. Smolensk air crash — the push for partisanship

The Smolensk air crash serves as a focus of current political positions and narratives defining media in Poland. The crash is important as it allows us to ask how much the current shift to the right and push for partisanship in the media can be seen as a consequence of the Smolensk crash itself and how much the crash served as a catalyst for a change to the right that for independent reasons had been under way already in Poland, and Europe more broadly.

April 10, 2010. Smolensk, Russia. A Polish presidential plane crashed in thick fog killing the president Lech Kaczyński, his wife and 94 people on board including the country's leading politicians, military generals and crew. They were flying for the official commemorations of the Katyń massacre, a deep scar in Polish history — the Soviet army executed more than 22,000 Polish officers with a shot to the back of the head during the Second World War. A combination of the crash with the sensitive anniversary in the middle of the presidential campaign⁵², with a location in Russia, became a potent symbolic turning point in Polish modern history. Initially seen as a national unity showcase by Adam Szostkiewicz from *Polityka* weekly, it soon:

...changed into a most divisive issue due to the policy adopted by the then opposition PiS party, contesting all official government facts and data concerning the catastrophe. This policy resulted in pro-PiS and Right Wing media spreading the war mongering rhetorics of the allegation of a conspiracy by Polish and Russian leaders to kill President Kaczyński and the truly patriotic part of Polish elite, just as it happened in 1940. Emotionally charged parallels with the Katyń massacre, as well as accusations of whitewashing the truth by Tusk government could not leave the media untouched.

⁵² Civic Platform PM Donald Tusk visited the Katyń site on April 7 together with President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. The separation of state commemorations and two visits of the Polish PM and President were the result of political rivalry ahead of the presidential elections. After the plane crash Jarosław Kaczyński, late president's twin brother became the Law and Justice party presidential candidate.

Still today there are fundamental differences in the way Polish politicians and journalist see the Smolensk crash, the investigation into it, and how the media dealt with the trauma. The spectrum of opinions is as wide as political divisions running through the Polish society as Bartosz Węglarczyk notes:

Breaking Poland in two started with Smolensk. Either you believed in the assassination or not. Some politicians who believed in the assassination from the beginning have accused those who didn't believe in it that they had known about it from the beginning. The politicians started this conflict and the journalists followed. The worst crisis in journalism, the crises of values, identity, and ethics started with the Smolensk case.

For Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy, the Smolensk air crash has also become a symbol of media failure and polarisation:

I think that many journalists defrauded their journalistic obligation. They simply didn't ask questions that should have been asked. [...] Later, some of the journalists started asking questions and even those centre-right turned sharply right-wing.

Prior to 2010, the conservative press was marginal. The only meaningful exception was *Radio Maryja*, a Catholic radio station run by a powerful Fr. Tadeusz Rydzyk. There were other outlets, including *salon24.pl* bloggers platform or the right-wing *Gazeta Polska*, with a mere 25,000 copies published daily, but their influence was small. The liberal press and television were much stronger, represented by *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily, *Polityka*, *Newsweek* weeklies or *TVN*, *Polsat TV* and state broadcasters loosely controlled by the Civic Platform government.

The creation of the right wing media was a matter of time in conservative and Catholic Poland. The Smolensk crash acted as a catalyst for the conservative journalists and allowed them to unite. In the post-crash era, a number of such outlets have appeared on the market: *wSieci* and *DoRzeczy* weeklies, *wPolityce.pl* web portal, *Republika TV*, *Solidarni 2010* and *Radio Wnet*. Right wing journalists felt their and their readers' voices were not heard

and a vast part of the Polish society remained under-represented in 1990s and 2000s on the media market. Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy:

There were only the media for the “right and correct” elites. It prompted a sharper response from the other side. And a media war, intermedia war, milieu war started. So this landscape became very polarised. And the right-wing side begun to be a lot more visible.

For the conservative journalists, the Smolensk air crash has become a cornerstone of the right-wing and conservative press in Poland as Jacek Karnowski sees it:

It wasn't that the free Poland was created and we had left- and right-wing media developing simultaneously. We had a dominant left-liberal camp in the media, and we had the reaction. And when you build something as a reaction, you build it in a different way. These media rose from something different, they rose after Smolensk, they were founded on blood.

As Jacek Karnowski points out it was no longer “*a quarrel about the vision of the world but one of the most important and dramatic events in the history of Poland*” and all — journalists inclusive — had to make their position clear:

Either you say that it was an accident and you laugh or you say that it must have been something serious and it was a break-through moment. There were people who tried to ask questions, but there was no “middle” ground. So as you can imagine, there was this quasi-civil war situation and it was intense.

On the other side of the political and media spectrum, Adam Michnik too thinks there is no room for compromise in the case of Smolensk.

Either there is a conspiracy and the president was murdered, or it was an accident similar to the plane crash of the Alexandrov Choir.⁵³ Accidents happen. What might be the compromise? Some of them were murdered by Russians, other by Germans, and some were

⁵³ The New York Times (2016) ‘Singers in Russian Military Choir Among 92 Feared Dead After Plane Crashes Into Black Sea’, 25 December 2016; https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/25/world/europe/russian-military-plane-crash-alexandrov-ensemble.html?_r=0

murdered by the officers themselves. That would make everyone happy, but it's impossible.

The Smolensk air crash has pushed Polish journalism to embrace a highly partisan, political and polarised approach. *Gazeta Polska* discussion clubs made of friends of the conservative newspapers have organised Smolensk commemorative events across Poland in small towns and big cities on the 10th of every month — the monthly anniversary of the crash. The Warsaw vigil has been attended by Jarosław Kaczyński, who has promised to bring to justice those responsible for the death of his brother and the others on board. He uses the monthly anniversary to send a political message.

As both sides argue whether the crash was a result of the assassination plot or a pilot's error acting under pressure to land in thick fog and challenging conditions there is no room for a compromise and this attitude has also spread onto other areas of public life. As the narratives have begun to split the country, politicians have exploited this opportunity for political gains and every issue from abortion to bicycle riding has become political.⁵⁴

After Law and Justice party came to power in 2015, a new Smolensk investigation commission was set up and the bodies of the crash victims have been exhumed for forensic examination. Every month, Polish media endlessly engage in a political spectacle on Smolensk. Debates are full of accusations, investigation details, conspiracy theories, post-crash politics and questions of responsibility, accountability and morality.

The Smolensk crash has become one of yet another dividing scars in Poland's history that will continue to divide society, politicians and journalists into tribes believing their own narrative. Within two years of the catastrophe, Polish Journalists Association members split when liberal journalists (Seweryn Blumsztajn, Jacek Żakowski, Krzysztof Bobiński,

⁵⁴ Politico (2016) 'Polish Conservative's PR pushback', 4 January 2016; <http://www.politico.eu/article/poland-nato-bases-germany-pis-waszczykowski-commission/>

Wojciech Maziarski) lost elections to become head of the organisation and decided to create their own, exclusive society, Towarzystwo Dziennikarskie.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Press (2012) 'Blumsztajn, 'Maziarski i Żakowski zakładają Towarzystwo Dziennikarskie', (Blumsztajn, Maziarski i Żakowski found Towarzystwo Dziennikarskie), 16 March 2012; http://www.press.pl/tresc/27784,blumsztajn_-maziarski-i-zakowski-zakladaja-towarzystwo-dziennikarskie

5. Journalists in Poland — proxies of political elites?

Journalism in Poland has often served as a good launching pad into politics. The list of prominent editor-in-chiefs and journalists of the official and underground press of the times of communism becoming top politicians in Poland is anything but short. Mieczysław Rakowski, editor of *Polityka* was Polish PM between 1988 and 1989. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, editor-in-chief of *Więź* and *Tygodnik Solidarność* was Polish PM between 1989 and 1991, Jan Olszewski, a columnist and dissident was Polish PM between 1991 and 1992. Adam Michnik, editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza* was an MP between 1989 and 1991 and Aleksander Kwaśniewski, once an editor-in-chief of a communist youth paper *Sztandar Młodych* became Polish president between 1995 and 2005. Donald Tusk, currently the president of the European Council and Polish PM between 2007 and 2014, worked as journalist at the *Samorządność* weekly. Antoni Macierewicz, an editor-in-chief of *Głos*, became a powerful Minister of Defence in Law and Justice government. Jarosław Kaczyński, once editor-in-chief of *Tygodnik Solidarność*, was Polish PM between 2006 and 2007 and is the most powerful politician in Poland since the Law and Justice party won parliamentary election in 2015.

A fundamental question that has not been answered in the post-1989 world is about the role of journalism in a free and democratic Poland. After years of political engagement, Polish journalists struggle to define how much are they willing to inform the public about the world and how much are they willing the shape it. Adam Michnik — the most influential journalist in Poland after the collapse of communism — reflects upon his role:

Foremostly I feel that I am a citizen who has been working as a managing editor of a large Polish daily newspaper and this is how I understand my engagement in politics. If politics is understood as strive for power, what is obvious, I am not a politician, but I used to be one. If politics is understood as a concern about the common good, active concern about the common good, then I am somehow engaged in politics.

Polish journalist-politicians know how to use media and they deploy their skill and resources at times of high political tension. But a definition of common good heavily depends on political views. The current almost tribal political divisions between media outlets can be traced back to the Polish tradition of politically engaged journalism. During communism the opposition remained united by a common enemy and desire to live in a free world. But now the old divisions in the post-Solidarność camp — visible already in 1989 — define the political frontline of today. Bartosz Węglarczyk:

From today's perspective we know that it was foolish to believe that the opposition will remain in this unity. This is democracy. Some of those in opposition have been right-wing and some left-wing. It was naïve to believe in the unity, in a mutual foe that would unite us.

For a former dissident Adam Michnik today *"everything is political, this era is political"* and it is time to make a stand again:

They (Law and Justice) are worse than the communists.[...] When it comes to Gazeta – we don't hide our political feelings. Do we say that the Law and Justice is as bad as the Civic Platform or the Modern party? We don't say that, we say that it's worse. And I say it openly.

The *Gazeta Wyborcza* staff have actively promoted and attended political rallies and supported the anti-government opposition.⁵⁶ For a *Polityka* weekly columnist Adam Szostkiewicz the times for journalists have become challenging again:

This is a time of a regime change in which pro-government media is collaborating with it; while the non-Law and Justice friendly or the Law and Justice controlled media is trying to defend it and liberal-minded part of public opinion against the Right Wing onslaught. There is less and less space for impartiality, I am afraid, but the liberal media is trying at least to be objective and factual in reporting.

⁵⁶ KOD (Komitet Obrony Demokracji - Committee for the Defence of Democracy) is a civic movement founded by Mateusz Kijowski in November 2015 and opposes actions of the Law and Justice government. It is modelled on the anti-communist civic movement KOR (Komitet Obrony Robotników - Workers' Defence Committee) established in 1976 of which member were: Antoni Macierewicz, Piotr Naimski, Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń, Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński, Zofia and Zbigniew Romaszewski, Jan Olszewski, Helena Łuczywo and many others.

Krzysztof Skowroński, the head of the Polish Journalists Association, openly stands up for the pro-government camp.

I think that one group says lies and the other says truth. [...] One of the sides and I mean this left-liberals should acknowledge that democracy is the joy of victory and sorrow of failure. These are the just rules of the game that we all agree upon in a democratic state. It can't be like: the victory is good if I win.

As the journalists take a tougher stance on so many issues, the public has lost trust in the media. A 2012 poll showed that people's perception of journalists partisanship has increased by 12% since 2002 (from 34 to 46). At the same time, respondents pointed to impartiality and objectivism (59%)⁵⁷ as the virtues they most desire from journalism. In 2017 79% of Poles agree that *"the message in the media is so diverse that Poles no longer know where the truth lies"* while 64% of those polled think journalists express their views instead of providing information.⁵⁸ Bartosz Węglarczyk observes his colleagues:

I personally know journalists who privately admit that there is a war in Poland and you need to take one of the sides. They say it openly in private talks, but soon they will say it publicly. It has nothing to do with journalism. These are politicians, who can write and can sometimes write quite well.

Once on the same side of the political anti-communist struggle, Adam Michnik and Jarosław Kaczyński are today in stark opposition to each other. Poland is locked in the narratives of the post Second World War generation that has shaped the country post-1989 and influenced younger generations of journalists. There is no better illustration of this division than the Kurski brothers. Jarosław and Jacek Kurski were young and politically engaged students in the rebellious city of Gdańsk⁵⁹ in the 1980s. Over time Jarosław Kurski has become Adam Michnik's deputy at *Gazeta Wyborcza* while the younger Jacek Kurski,

⁵⁷ CBOS (2012) 'Opinie na temat pracy dziennikarzy' (Opinions on the subject of journalists' work), BS/164/2012, December 2012; http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2012/K_164_12.PDF

⁵⁸ CBOS (2017), 'Ocena wiarygodności telewizyjnych programów informacyjnych i publicystycznych', ('Evaluation of credibility of television news and news programmes'), 10 May 2017.

⁵⁹ The Solidarność movement was born in the city of Gdańsk. Lech Wałęsa, Donald Tusk, Lech Kaczyński, Adam Michnik and many others met during the anti-communist government strikes in 1980.

was appointed the head of the state broadcaster TVP by the Law and Justice party led by Jarosław Kaczyński.

Polish politicians and journalist to a large extent share the same background, come from the same anti-communist opposition groups, universities or student organisations, such as NZS.⁶⁰ In 2005, two post-Solidarność political parties dominated the elections effectively eliminating the post-communist party. The Civic Platform and the Law and Justice party promised a grand coalition and a big change in the campaign. Both parties have been conservative with the Civic Platform appealing to the winners of the transformation and the Law and Justice addressing poorer and less successful class of the society. One was outward looking the other inward looking. The Law and Justice party's surprise victory stunned the campaign frontrunner. Televised negotiations to form the promised grand coalition government failed.

The political rivalry between Kaczyński brothers and Donald Tusk was growing day by day. And so the journalists were pulled into the political game. But it was the Smolensk air crash that helped to turn those two splitting tribes of politicians and journalists from the same anti-communist camp into warring factions. The logic of tribal war has led to a situation when both sides use the same language, fight for the same symbols but have built their position in opposition to each other. Krzysztof Skowroński sees these divisions as the two faces of the same coin:

There were two manifestations in Warsaw: of the Law and Justice and the Committee for the Defence of Democracy. There were two ladies there and they were telling the same story. In 1981 my husband was imprisoned for political activism and I am here to fight for freedom. In 1981 my husband was a political prisoner and I fight for freedom today. Two groups that think in the exact same way.

The trauma of the crash in the national psyche drives divisions in the world of politics that runs through the society and increases the level of partisanship of the journalistic community. Krzysztof Skowroński notes:

⁶⁰ NZS — Independent Students' Association in the 1980. Members included current politicians from Law and Justice and Civic Platform and many prominent journalists.

There is the planet of the conservative journalists who say that Poland is this and that. And the second planet is composed of the liberal journalists, who say this and that. The conservative journalists say: "Poland is a country who has been regaining its freedom, independence" and there is the second group that says: "the end of freedom of speech, dictatorship, evolution towards the totalitarian regime." From this perspective this narrative is absurd like a train with wings.

Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy has seen Polish journalists getting close to politicians for many years. She notes two attitudes rooted deeply in the experience of communism. One was a submissive and service-like attitude of a journalist working for the regime media and the other was rebellious.

That is why, in my journalistic opinion, we have this on-going fight ethos. It means, that in general as a journalist you are more of a politician than a politician himself. Journalists are this more aggressive side, not politicians. Not always of course, but very often. Therefore, on both sides of this political spectrum, we find journalists who turn out to be more dedicated to the politics than the politicians themselves.

In pursuit of audience and with little funding available, the cheapest television or radio shows have been made of politicians with opposing views invited to the studio to fight each other. So the Polish political debate has been largely reduced to the contest of values where there is no more middle ground, as Bartosz Węglarczyk notes:

Everything was replaced with emotions, emotions are world views. That's why politicians like this discussions about abortion. Because knowledge is not important. Everything is about emotions now.

Poland's media market has been heavily influenced by the Western style and capital but not by its values and standards. So the market has undergone the process of tabloidisation and commercialisation without any proper debate on the journalistic role of private and public media. As Bartosz Węglarczyk notes journalists "*become politicians and political activists and in fact the readers have accepted that*". As Polish journalists continue to solidify their opinions, Skowroński says the narrative has replaced truth:

That's what the journalists do — they deliver a narrative. Those in politics send them text messages “say this and that”. We do it, we go to the TV stations, a journalist accepts that and says “ok”. But it's not!

Journalists' partisanship and political bias have become a sought-after commodity in the new market economy driven by internet, social media, speed and simplification. And, with the arrival and spread of the internet, the entry barrier to the market fell. Jacek Karnowski together with his twin brother Michał have successfully built the conservative Fratria media group behind *wSieci* weekly and the *wPolityce.pl* web portal. The brothers had a solid work experience in legacy media; Jacek Karnowski worked for the *BBC Polish Service* and *TVP*. Michał Karnowski worked for *Newsweek Polska* and *Polska the Times*. Jacek Karnowski says this experience helped them understand “*the media are businesses. Apart from fulfilling an important role, they are businesses.*” They too have embraced a form of journalistic engagement that has emerged in Poland under the name of “*dziennikarstwo tożsamościowe*” or “journalism of identity” that offers ideologically engaged narratives that help build a community of like-minded readers.⁶¹ A joint *wPolityce.pl* and *wSieci* subscription call reads:

We invite you to the Network of Friends of the web portal *wPolityce.pl* and the largest conservative weekly of opinions in Poland “*wSieci*”. This way you can support media, for which a determinant of action is care for *Rzeczpospolita* in the spirit of truth, good and beauty.

We invite you to the **bevy of the members of our community**. We believe that thanks to a fixed subscription of our publications prepared especially for our Friends we will be **lasting guests in Your houses** — on computer screens, on tablets and mobile devices. Thanks to technology development we can offer You access to a bigger collection of interesting articles, good political writing and opinions, to media created with passion and mission, with

⁶¹ *wPolityce.pl* (2016) ‘Sieć przyjaciół’, (The network of friends’); https://siec.wpolityce.pl/oferta?utm_source=wpolityce&utm_campaign=siecprzyjaciol&utm_medium=button_art

belief in **strength of the national interest**, media based on Polish capital and conservative values.

The Network of Friends is a community of Readers. We want this place to become a platform connecting people to whom that fate of Poland is indifferent and follow with attention domestic events described in the weekly "wSieci" and on the webpages of wPolityce portal.

Marzena Nykiel – editor-in-chief of the web portal wPolityce.pl

Jacek Karnowski – editor-in-chief of the weekly „wSieci”

A combination of increasingly lower entry barriers onto the media market, a strong worldview resulting in engaged "journalism of identity" and know-how of modern media business helped Jacek and Michal Karnowski open an internet TV platform *wPolsce.pl* on 19th June 2017. Beata Szydło, the Prime Minister of Poland from the Law and Justice government gave the first interview marking the launch of the channel.⁶² State television 24 hours news channel *TVP INFO* picked the feed of this interview from [YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) and put it on air.

In Poland, like in the US, the UK, and other countries the "journalism of identity" has proven to be an economically viable strategy in the times of financial hardship hitting hard the old traditional media outlets. With the lack of funding it has been difficult to maintain a high level of journalistic professionalism and remain impartial, objective and independent.

⁶² www.wPolsce.pl (2017), Premiera wPolsce.pl - transmisja na żywo, ('Premiere of wPolsce.pl - live transmission'), 19 June 2017; <http://wpolsce.pl/rozmowa/6-premiera-wpolscepl-transmisja-na-zywo>

6. Conclusions — look ahead

After 1989, Poland did not adopt the Anglo-American liberal press model which strives to distinguish between reporting facts and opinions. Any attempt at transforming the state broadcasters into an organisation similar to the *BBC* in Poland has not been successful. Instead, Polish journalism followed more closely a continental model where opinions and reporting blend together.

The Polish media have always been political and the state broadcasters have been dependent on the ruling party of the time. They have undergone a radical transformation along with the broader systemic transformation since 1989 but following the 2010 plane crash in which the late president Lech Kaczyński died in Smolensk (Russia), they have been subject to another vast change and reform.

The return of the right wing discourse in Poland was a matter of time. On the one hand, it has been driven to a certain extent by the worldwide trend and the rise of the conservative and populist politics. On the other hand, *Radio Maryja*, *Gość Niedzielny* and *Gazeta Polska* could not have served as the only meaningful representative media for conservative audiences in a deeply Catholic country. The Smolensk crash served as a catalyst for that change and helped to push for a very partisan and polarised media landscape. Political divisions seem to be unbridgeable and driven by beliefs and emotions of a moral dimension rather than facts and dialogue.

Globalisation and the spread of the internet have created a space for views underrepresented by the legacy media. In a vastly Catholic country the conservative press — insignificant politically until 2010 — have embraced new forms of journalistic engagement and have emerged in the post-Smolensk reality in the form of so-called “dziennikarstwo tożsamościowe” or “journalism of identity” offering narratives that lock audiences into a particular mind set. For those publications, this proved to be a new business model in an increasingly fragmented market — a strategy of survival in times of economic uncertainty.

Since the Law and Justice party came to power in October 2015, the state media have swung its coverage to the right and its message is largely backing the government. In a polarised and politicised world of Polish media, those who stand on the right side of the political spectrum see this as a positive change enhancing pluralism and giving voice to the underrepresented sections of the Polish society, while those on the left side of politics see it as an attack on free media and democracy. The narrative has become the main driver for the process of editorial decision making, and the press have followed the politicians. The middle ground for any compromise diminishes by the day as the warring factions of journalists take a harder political stance and embrace political activism as a way out. Given the legacy of Polish journalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, the strategy of struggle is part of the journalistic tradition in Poland. Yet political parallelism in the 21st century is still far away from the levels seen between 1918-1939, a period in Polish press history largely considered as the most partisan with political parties owning its own outlet.

In general the Polish media are still free, pluralist, increasingly partisan and engaged in the political fight, but the tilt to the right of the state broadcasters and the change of the paradigm from public to national has a polarising effect on the media landscape while journalism loses trust and credibility in the eyes of Poles.

The level of partisanship of the press on the Blumler and Gurevitch scale has traditionally been very high in Poland. Between 1918 and 1939 most of the press outlets were directly owned by political parties and served their interest. After the Second World War the majority of the communist press was directly managed by the party apparatus. And the underground anti-communist press was owned and controlled by the opposition.

After the collapse of communism and the media market liberalisation, the level of partisanship was oscillating between the second and third degree on the Blumler and Gurevitch scale. The openly expressed aim of the political establishment has been to create non-partisan public media obliged to neutrality by the relevant legislation. Politicians from left

to right have prevented a real change that could lead to a non-partisan public broadcaster. The communist legacy of treating public radio and television as a means of party communications rather than a common public good has prevailed.

Since the Law and Justice party came to power, the state media have reached the highest degree of partisan involvement as the government is now directly associated with the running of *TVP* and *Radio Polskie* via ownership and direct appointments of the management and editorial boards.

Private media degree of partisanship is lower but visible. A lot of conservative outlets (*wSieci, wPolityce, DoRzeczy, Republika, Gazeta Polska*) have no structural connection with the ruling or any other political party but the government can count on their loyalty and criticism is sporadic.

Left and liberal publications (*Gazeta Wyborcza, Newsweek, Polityka*), too, are reaching the second degree of partisanship as the united opposition parties and anti-government civic groups are given the benefit of loyalty and internal criticism is marginal. Political engagement by some of the most prominent liberal journalists like Adam Michnik, Jarosław Kurski, Jacek Żakowski, Tomasz Lis, is highly partisan and anti-governmental.

There are also a number of publications classified with the third degree of partisanship (*Rzeczpospolita, Dziennik*) while only a few outlets can be seen as non-partisan. Political neutrality is often a goal for the media founded with foreign capital but their situation may change as the government plans to re-nationalise the media whom they see as an arm of foreign interests on Polish soil. Media organisations based on foreign capital face an uncertain future.

Polish politicians have a very powerful financial tool in their hands. In the old days the communist government was in control of paper and the printing press. Today the state is in charge of state advertisement funds. The Law and Justice government has recently re-

channeled money from the liberal to the right wing press. This change in funding in return has led to increased polarisation and partisanship.

Among all of my interviewees there is a shared belief that there should be distance between the world of politics and the world of journalism. But in a country where the two professions have blurred the lines so much, there is no immediate and foreseeable end to the political and journalistic crisis. There is also no trust between the warring factions and journalists who have not declared political allegiance yet are now being called to take positions. Until the political tension decreases there is no chance for non-partisan public journalism in Poland. Conservative journalist Jacek Karnowski says the current deep change is about correcting the post-communism and there is no need to worry.

Kaczyński wants a normal European country with a balance of power, he doesn't want a new order.

But an old time dissident feels the time is running out. The future of the media and democracy is in danger, according to Adam Michnik:

We will see what comes next. But if I am right and Kaczyński will implement the Putin model of the state transformation, our prospects are gloomy. Putin, in fact, eliminated independent media [...].

The next parliamentary elections scheduled for 2019 will decide the future of the Polish media. Until then the divisions between pro and anti-government press will only keep on growing, mirroring political tensions in the country. In the new media order driven by social media, speed and polarisation the Smolensk crash has proven to be a potent catalyst for the resurrection of the old pre-1989 divisions running deep through the Polish society.

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Appendix: Questionnaire for the semi-structured interview

Basic information

- Name, age, work position, media
- How long have you been working as a journalist / media analyst?

Journalism in Poland

- What was the legacy of communist era journalism?
- Can you describe the media landscape in 1989 and shortly after?
- How do you see the role of Gazeta Wyborcza? How much has that changed since 1989?
- How would you describe editorial decision making process in the state and private media outlets in Poland?
- How powerful and popular do Polish journalists feel themselves to be?
- How far can a journalist for the state controlled media insist on objectivity in his / her reporting?

Smolensk crash

- What impact has the Smolensk crash had on journalism in Poland?
- How has the media landscape in Poland changed after April 2010?
- How do Polish journalists report on the crash?

Partisan vs non-partisan media

- How do you understand the role of media and journalism in Poland?
- Do you think journalists in Poland can be objective and impartial? (If not why?)
- What are the factors making maintaining a neutral and objective position so difficult in Polish media landscape?

- How close are the relations between politicians and journalists in post 1989 Poland?
- How much Polish journalists' own political views impact their work? Do they actually realise that?
- Are Polish journalists proxies of today's political battle? To what extent? Should they be politically active and engaged?

Journalism in Poland and the state of democracy

- What impact will the current shift from public to "national" media have on democracy and free media in Poland?
- How much do you see the current conflict as a reflection of historical and current political divisions?
- What are good ways to avoid dramatic politicisation of the state media?
- How do media in new and old democracies stand up to the ruling political class?