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Thematisation in Polish current affairs TV programmes during the 2014 European election campaign: autopoiesis in the Polish media system

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The aim of this study was to examine the quality of Polish public debates on the European elections; in other words, how current affairs TV programmes tried to explain the complexity of issues concerning the European Union and the essence of how the European Parliament operates to the average viewer-voter. In the study, the methodology of qualitative and quantitative content analysis were implemented. The paper focuses on the phenomenon of thematisation in the TV programmes covered in the study. Much attention in the discussions of the journalistic topics was given to such issues as the process and dynamics of a given campaign, the manner of its coverage by the media and the polls. In this regard, the results of the study confirmed a strong autopoietic (definition of the Luhmann's theory) and self-referential nature of the electoral discourse.

Key words: thematisation, topics, current affairs TV programmes, discourse, autopoietic

Introduction

It is believed that today's daily life cannot be imagined without media, particularly the mass media. They are omnipresent in politics, economy, education, and arts, as well as other public and private spheres of our lives. Besides sleeping and working, we spend most of our time using mass media (Kepplinger and Maurer, 2000; McCombs and Shaw, 1993). They represent the world in the society for the society and they are a significant source of knowledge about the world in which we live (Luhmann, 2000: 1). According to the concept of the "Media

Society" and the process of Mediatisation, media is a societal phenomenon penetrating all areas of modern, globalised societies (Saxer, 2007: 26; Hjarvard, 2008). Therefore, societies act more and more according to the logic of mass media. Mass media have become important for politics and its actors, as well as for the scientific community and its discourses (Bourdieu, 1996). However, the mass-mediated picture of the world is not a mirror, reflecting the actual reality; rather, the reality as presented in the media is constructed by the media and their mechanisms of selection and presentation

styles (Semetko and Valkenburg, 2000). This fact is especially obvious for topics that are not part of our direct and primary experience. One of the paradigms of social science research, the social constructivist perspective, argues that the public defines the attributes of risks via social construct (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Second-Order Elections – theoretical framework

According to Reif and Schmitt (1980), the European elections seem to be the so-called Second-Order Elections (SOE). The First-order Elections (FOE) are, of course, the national elections. What is more, the results and campaigns of the European elections – from the SOE’s perspective – are influenced by the political constellation of a national political arena and are characterised by the dominance of the first-order arena national political issues (Reif and Schmitt, 1980: 247). In this case, we have to remember the very important concept of Europeanisation (Börzel and Risse, 2003; Cowles et al., 2001; Featherstone and Radaeli, 2003; Ladrech, 2010). Europeanisation is understood as a process by which domestic actors and institutions adapt to the institutional framework and logic of the EU or, in other words, as the responses of national actors to the impact of the European integration (Ladrech, 2002: 392–393; Radaelli, 2000, Kovár and Kovár, 2012: 32). From this point of view, Europeanisation, treated as a logic process of media, presents different ways of how political parties wage the EP Election campaigns. The media seems to be a good platform for an analysis of how political actors deal with the issues associated with the European integration during the EP Elections (Kriesi, 2007: 90).

After more than three decades and six rounds of the EP elections, the SOE model

has, by large, become one of the most widely tested and supported theories of voting behaviour in the elections to the EP (e. g., Ferrara and Weishaupt, 2004; Freire and Teperoglou, 2007; Hix and Marsh, 2007). We should also be aware of the fact that media outlets constitute the most important source of political information and provide a channel of communication between the governors and the governed, particularly in relation to such a remote and abstract issue as the European Union (EU) politics. It is also an important channel of information in the case of the Second-Order EP elections (Strömbäck and Shehata, 2010; Blumler, 1983; Koopmans, 2007, Bennett and Entman, 2001; European Commission, 2004: 162). Given the highly “national” structure of the EP Elections and their identification as SOEs, where the national political arena provides the dominant frame of reference, it is hardly surprising that the campaigns should be nationally differentiated.

Methodology

In this particular paper (taking into consideration the above-mentioned concept of Second Order-Election), the author would like to present some results of the complex research conducted in 2014, particularly within two weeks before the European Elections in Poland (10-23 May 2014). The purpose of the study was to analyse the quality of the journalistic discourse during the electoral period and to see how current affairs TV programmes, covered in the study, tried to explain the complexity of issues concerning the European Union and the essence of the functioning of the European Parliament to the average viewer-voter. The research was conducted on the request of the Polish National Broadcasting Council and was based

on the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the content of the current affairs television programmes (complex code key, charts of quality analysis for each programme and transcriptions of journalists' statements). The research team studied various aspects of the political discourse in current-affairs TV programmes (in two weeks before elections in six of the most watched TV stations), including: structure of the programmes (construction or parts of the programmes, visuals, video editing), guests and anchors of the programmes (types of guests, affiliation, time and place of exposure, considering passive appearances without saying anything as opposed to guests actively appearing and talking), rhetoric, argumentation strategies, interactions with journalists and opponents, the number of interruptions (style of interrupting), anchors' style of delivery (meaningful verbal and non-verbal behaviours), the questioning of strategies, interactions with guests and self-presentation (including topics discussed and knowledge presented on air), the role and image of women, such as women guests (number in proportion to men, guest type, style of communication and conversation), women anchors (evaluated as mentioned above), missionary television values (according to Polish law): pluralism, impartiality, balance, integrity, quality and, finally, thematisation, which includes topics that were discussed, time devoted to each topic, and also self-reference of the media system.

The conducted research focused on – *inter alia* – the behaviour of journalists as hosts of current affairs programmes during the election campaign. One of the study goals was to determine whether the discourse created by journalists is informative and explicative, i.e., to what degree does it attempt to explain to viewers the

importance of the elections and the operation of certain institutions, present candidate positions, their competencies and proposals, and interpret important political and social phenomena that accompany elections.

To achieve the goals of the study, the researcher adopted the following criteria of qualifying materials to the study sample: the programme was broadcasted in nationwide television and exhibited the qualities of a current affairs programme (genre criterion); the programme was broadcasted in the last two weeks before the election silence (time criterion); presence of a European candidate during the broadcast or the European Parliament elections as the main topic of the discussion (representing at least 50 % of the broadcast duration). The programmes under analysis were broadcasted in six major TV stations in Poland in terms of viewership and impact factors: general TV stations, public stations (TVP1 and TVP2), the public news programme TVP Info, commercial news programmes TVN24 and Polsat News as well as the social and catholic station TV Trwam.

In the quantitative analysis, the researchers also applied the journalistic language load index, the purpose of which was to provide a cross-cut view of the degree to which journalists use neutral language in a given programme without loaded phrasing (low index values) or the opposite – language containing many evaluative and emotive phrases (high index values, even when not directed at guests of the programme). The following operating definition of loaded language was adopted: “nouns containing strong positive or negative connotations (e.g., prostitute, bribe) of which non-loaded synonyms exist (e.g., a woman of easy virtue, private financial gain); emotive language – nouns and adjectives illustrating the journalist's emotional state (being resentful,

appalled, concerned or touched), language of value judgment – evaluative adjectives (good, terrifying, evil, horrible).” As an accessory measure of text comprehensibility (aside from loading coded in a qualitative way) it is also possible to use the Gunning Fog index (Fog index, Gunning 1952), a measure developed by an American named Robert Gunning to assess the complexity of different kinds of texts (from press releases and marketing texts to journalistic and legal writing). All quotes from journalists hosting the programs were written down and the finished transcripts were then analysed according to a relevant algorithm.

Furthermore, a factor that clearly differentiated individual broadcasts was the value of the total averaged index of non-verbal behaviours of journalists. The following operating definition of loaded non-verbal behaviours was adopted: grimaces of mimic muscles, eye movements suggesting an emotional attitude towards the topic of the conversation, gesticulation – gestures of hands, motions of the arms and head, shifts in the stance illustrating the journalist’s positive or negative attitude to the interviewee, paraverbal aspects – raising one’s voice, shouting, shifting of tone or pitch to illustrate irony, aggression or clear approval of the interviewee.

The next aspect under review was the questioning strategies applied by journalists. Two types of questions were defined: questions about information and opinion. For questions about information, the researcher qualified inquiries the response to which could be ascribed as the truth/false differentiation; i.e., questions about specific facts, data, events, people. For questions about opinion, the researcher qualified those that included requests for the evaluation of specific facts, events, situations, people, made along the line of good-bad; i.e., these

were mostly open questions which encourage loaded, evaluative answers. During research, the author also developed the question index, i.e., averagely, how many questions about information and opinion as well as the total number of questions were asked by journalists in public and non-public television per minute – number of questions per broadcast duration. Moreover, the research team measured the average intervention index for all channels covered by monitoring based on eligible analysed situations. Additionally, the paper author also included the total number of interventions identified and codified during the study in each broadcast covered by monitoring, constituting part of the current affairs programmes line-up of individual channels during the last two weeks of the European Parliament election campaign. It is also worth noting that interventions included all interruption cases of the speaking guest by the journalist as well as the attempts to interrupt (e.g., by hand-raising or monosyllabic attempts at interruption).

To sum up, the submitted paper attempted to answer (in some certain aspects) the following research questions: to what extent do the Polish current affairs TV programmes present the most important information about the European Union and the challenges that the European Union, along with its representatives, is facing? What kind of tasks and topics are being dealt with? Of course, because of the lack of space, the author will focus only on some results – the thematisation of discourse and the exposure of parties.

Results – thematisation of discourse and parties’ exposure

The research material contains all current affairs TV programmes in which EP can-

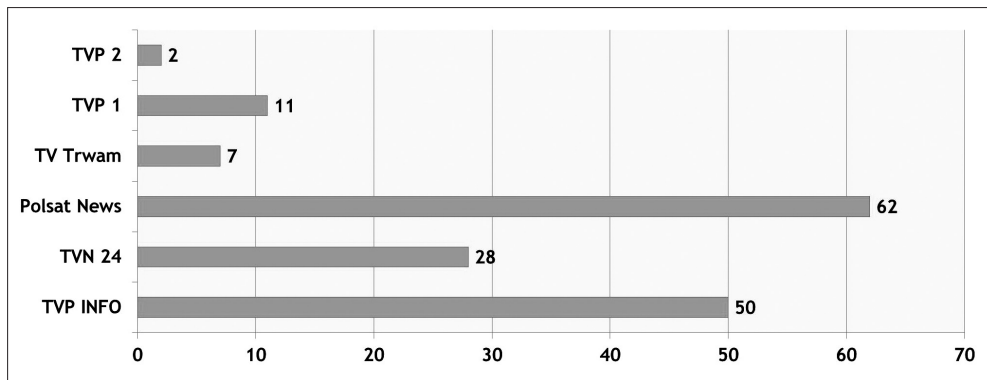


Figure No. 1. Number of unique TV material

Source: own research

didates appeared or in which topics related to the EP elections were raised within two weeks before the European Elections, that is in the period between 10 and 23 May 2014. The study encompassed the following Polish nationwide stations – TVP1, TVP2, TVN24, Polsat News, TVP Info, TV Trwam (55 hours of study in total). The first figure below presents the exact number of unique TV materials, devoted solely to the elections, from the whole research sample (in total: 160 unique current affairs TV programmes).

It is worth mentioning that these channels broadcast the most popular current affairs TV programmes. The three of them, TVP1, TVP2, and TVP Info, are publicly-owned. It must be underlined that TVP INFO is a typical news-dedicated channel, which is part of the Polish national public broadcaster – TVP (TVP 1 and TVP 2 are mainstream channels that are not entirely dedicated to news broadcasting). TVN24 and Polsat News are the news channels owned by the two main competitors of TVP – TVN and Polsat, which are private, commercial TV stations. Finally, there is also TV Trwam, which is the biggest social and catholic broadcaster – non-public, quasi-private (run by the Foundation Lux

Veritatis – according to the license, it cannot emit commercials). In general, TV Trwam is in great opposition to the rest of the channels, both in terms of programmes that are broadcasted and its political affiliation. We have to add that the voice of TV Trwam is one of the most influential ones in the Polish discourse; therefore, the study cannot ignore it and focus only on the mainstream TV news stations.

The main focus of this paper are topics that were discussed during analyzed current affairs programmes, time devoted to each topic, and – in consequences – also the self-reference of the media system (According to Luhmann's concept).

Exposure of political parties during the 2014 European Campaign in Poland

Because of the space constraints, the author would like to focus only on two aspects of the aforementioned study. The first aspect is related with the following questions: how did the structure of a given party's TV exposure, presented in the last two weeks before the European elections, eventually influence the electoral results? Are these

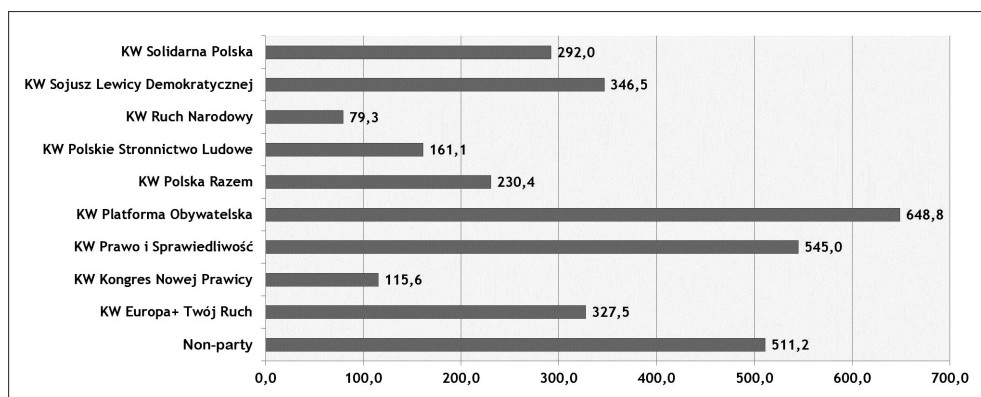


Figure No. 2. *Presence of the political parties on air (in minutes)*

Source: own research

two issues correlated? If they are, what does that signify? Another question that is to be raised is connected with the idea of media thematisation in relation to the European Campaign – what was it about and what kind of topics made up the political discourse during the last days before the elections.

The second figure below shows the presence of the electoral committees of particular political parties on air (in minutes).

Two main parties – the Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform – the governing party) and the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice – the main opposition party) – were most frequently presented in the programmes covered in the analysis. A group of experts, advisers, spin doctors, former politicians and officials – named as the “Non-party” – ranked third. The second governing party (a smaller coalition partner) – the Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe (Polish People’s Party) – received only 161.1 minutes of exposure. It was twice less than two other Polish parliamentary opposition parties – the Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (Democratic Left Alliance) and the Europa+ Twój Ruch (Europe+Your Move). If we look closer at the next graph

(Figure No. 3), which presents the structure of exposure in every TV station included in the research, we will see that all three news stations tried to present various electoral committees.

Generally, the more diverse the figure, the greater the pluralism of a given television station. Furthermore, the more evenly and symmetrical the greyscale in the graph appear, the greater the impartiality of a given station is – of course, if we make a simplification and decide to measure the exposure of the political parties as the main determinant. At this point, it should be noted that there is a great disproportion when it comes to TV Trwam. This social and religious TV station is strongly affiliated with the right wing parties that are, at the moment, in opposition – the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) and the Polska Jest Najważniejsza (Poland Comes First). Therefore, these two political groups received the greatest amount of airtime. The third group which was given some amount of coverage in TV Trwam consisted of experts, advisers, and social activists. Other stations tried to provide a more or less similar amount of airtime for all electoral committees.

Now, if we take into account the relation between media exposure – the visibility in the current affairs TV programmes, broadcasted within the last two weeks before the 2014 European elections – and the final results achieved by each electoral committee, we will notice that they are not accidental, but correlated. We believe that there is an even stronger correlation between being in the current affairs TV programmes and achieving proportional electoral results. The following charts and tables present the r-Pearson correlations. Table No. 1 and

figure No. 4 show the general correlations between the exposure of electoral committees on TV and their electoral results.

Almost all of the tables and figures presented above show a significant linear r-Pearson correlation between the visibility of particular parties in the current affairs TV programmes within the last two weeks before the European elections and their final electoral results. In general – in table No. 1 and figure No. 4 – we can see that the correlations are really strong, with $\alpha : 0.002$ and r-Pearson: 0.877. If we take a precise

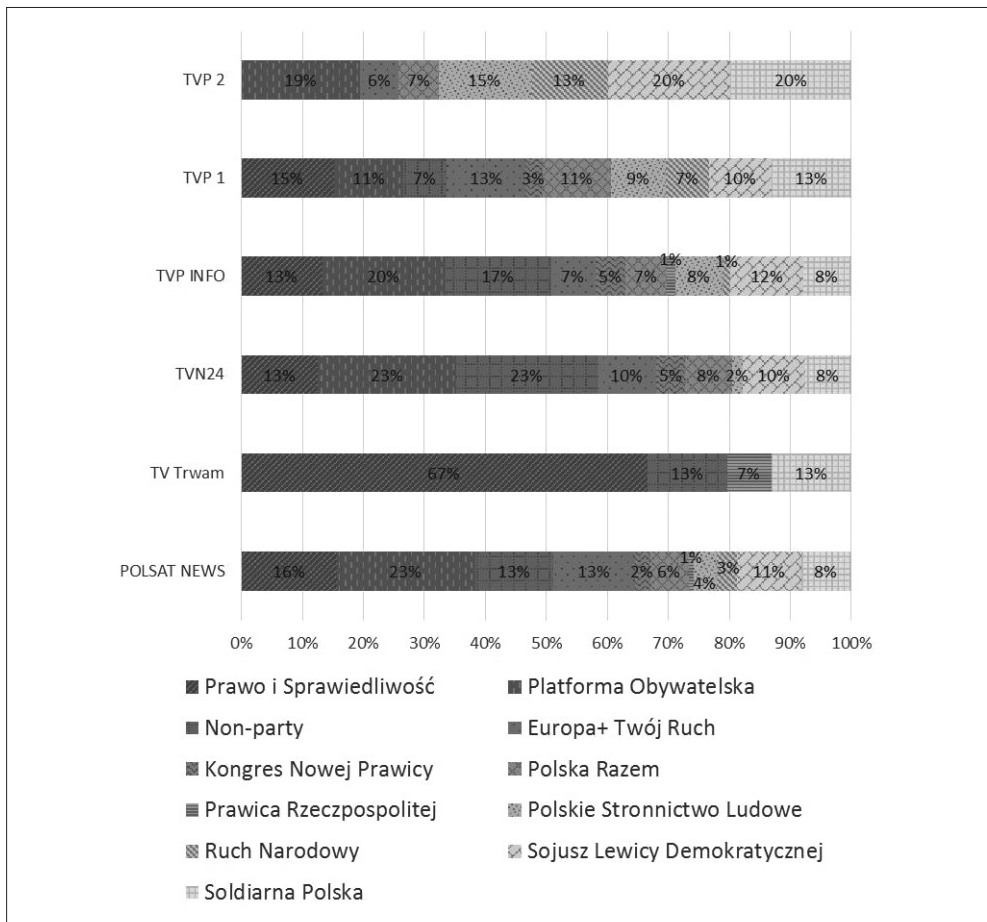


Figure No. 3. Structure of exposure of political parties by TV stations

Source: own research

Table No. 1. Cumulative time on air of political parties vs. their electoral results in the EP election

<i>European Elections 2014</i>	<i>Exposure in minutes</i>	<i>Electoral results (pct.)</i>
PO	648.8	32.13
PiS	545	31.78
SLD	346.5	9.44
E+TR	327.5	3.57
SP	292	3.98
PR	230.4	3.16
PSL	161.1	6.8
KNP	115.6	7.15
RN	79.3	1.39

Source: own research

Table No. 1a. Cumulative linear r-Pearson correlation result (Exposure in minutes vs. electoral results of parties)

r-Pearson : 0,877
α : 0,002

Source: own research

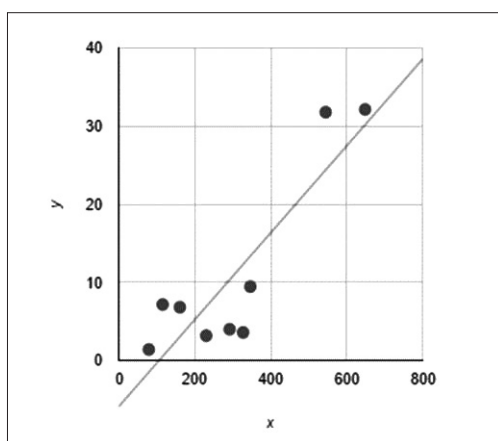


Figure No. 4. Graphical presentation of linear r-Pearson correlation result (Exposure in minutes vs. Electoral results of parties)

Source: own research

look at the rest of the tables (No. 2-3) and figures (No. 5-7), we can notice that this general correlation is also maintained in the case of the two TV news channels covered in the research – TVP INFO (the biggest correlation and a great level of significance) and Polsat News (also big correlations, but with a lower level of significance). The

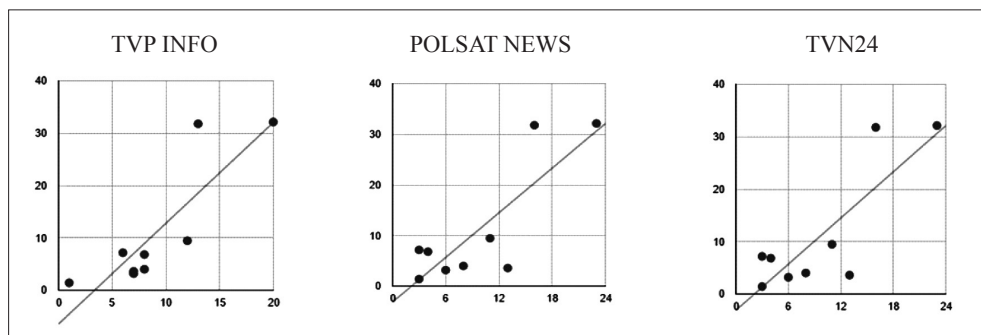
weakest correlation was discovered in the case of TVN24 (r-Pearson: 0.793; α : 0.011).

As we may see, this simple data summary could be supportive of the following thesis: if one's exposure in the current affairs TV programmes within the last two weeks before the European Elections is high, one will receive better electoral re-

Table No. 2. **Linear r-Pearson correlations results for news tv stations (structure of exposure vs election results)**

TVP INFO	POLSAT NEWS	TVN24
r-Pearson: 0.852	r-Pearson : 0.823	r-Pearson : 0.793
α : 0.004	α : 0.006	α : 0.011

Source: own research



Figures No. 5–7. **Graphical presentation of linear r-Pearson correlation results (structure of exposure vs. election results)**

Source: own research

Table No. 3. **Percentage of time on air of political parties vs. electoral results in the EP election**

European Elections 2014	TVP Info		Polsat News		TVN24	
	Exposure (pct.)	Results (pct.)	Exposure (pct.)	Results (pct.)	Exposure (pct.)	Results (pct.)
PO	20	32.13	23	32.13	23	32.13
PiS	13	31.78	16	31.78	13	31.78
SLD	12	9.44	11	9.44	10	9.44
E+TR	7	3.57	13	3.57	10	3.57
SP	8	3.98	8	3.98	8	3.98
PR	7	3.16	6	3.16	8	3.16
PSL	8	6.8	4	6.8	2	6.8
KNP	6	7.15	3	7.15	5	7.15
RN	1	1.39	3	1.39	0	1.39

Source: own research

sults. However, this intuitive assumption does not have to be true in every case. We have to bear in mind that the linear correlation values presented above are heavily based on the two main and biggest parties, PO (Civic Platform) and PiS (Law and

Justice). If we eliminate these two parties from the graph/table and leave only the small ones, the correlation between the exposure of these parties in the TV news stations and their electoral results will be much lower, a mere 0.44. One could say

that the globally dominant parties are heavily exposed, but the smaller ones are only slightly exposed. However – according to the latter remark – we can say, in simple terms, that the smaller a party is, the lower the r-Pearson correlation between the electoral results and the exposure of this very party on TV is noted. It turns out that the dependence on the exposure in TV and the electoral results can be noticed only if we take the dominant parties into consideration. For now, it is worth remembering that these observations may be primarily related with the specificity of elections, particularly in the case of the European elections. We do not have enough space to present other variables of the political discourse that were analysed in terms of their correlation with electoral results; however, we have to say that there are numerous studies and a great deal of research which prove that the European elections do not have to be perceived on par with other elections that take place in any democratic country.

Thematisation of Polish discourse during the 2014 European Elections

According to the aforesaid observations, the following questions arise: to what extent do the Polish current affairs TV programmes present the most important information about the EU and the challenges that the European Union and, consequently, the European Parliament, along with their representatives, are facing? What kind of tasks and topics are they dealing with? Finally, what kind of an institution is the European Parliament? What can and cannot the EPs do? What kind of pledges can they make?

The majority of the answers to these questions seem to be hidden in one of the most important categories of this study, namely the thematisation of the political

discourse in the Polish current affairs TV programmes (see f. ex.: Boyatzis 1998; Jalali and Silva, 2011, Bolin, 2014, Hollander, 2014). In other words, it concerns the question of what topics and threads were mainly discussed by the anchors and their guests during the programmes covered in the study.

First of all, in the research, we described 841 thematic units (one topic discussed in one programme was classified as a single unit), with two levels of coding. Generally, we have identified:

- 623 unique thematic units aggregated at a detailed level;
- 185 thematic categories aggregated at a generalised level.

What has to be emphasised is the fact that out of the 185 thematic categories [clusters] aggregated at the generalised level – the clustered level (according to Krippendorff, 1980) – top ten categories constitute almost 66 per cent of the 841 thematic units that were identified. These categories were classified as thematic units and are listed in the following table, along with the percentage and the total number of occurrence.

What should be added is the fact that the primary sets of information, encoded for all of the programmes covered in the study, consisted of the topics that were discussed in each of these programmes. As a separate topic, we also encoded an each single thread in the discussion, the so-called interjections made by the journalists or one of the guests, which introduced a new issue that was, nevertheless, not discussed further in the programme. A surprising observation can be drawn from the results presented in table No. 4, namely the strength of the autopoietic (Luhmann, 2000) materials in the journalism devoted to the EP Elections (See: Schuck et. al., 2013). A

Table No. 4. *Thematisation of electoral discourse (two weeks before the EP election)*

<i>Subject</i>	<i>Number of occurrence</i>	<i>Percentage of all subjects</i>
Electoral campaign itself	302	36%
The current politics of the parties	76	9 %
Polls	55	7 %
Statements of assets	31	4 %
Quality of public debate	24	3 %
Ukrainian crisis	21	2 %
Energy union	16	2 %
Integration deepening	11	1 %
Flood protection	10	1 %
Self-presentation of politics	8	1 %

Source: own research

very high percentage of discussions held by the journalists concerned, to a greater or lesser extent, the campaign itself – its style, rhetoric employed by various parties, electoral spots, communication strategies, etc. The topics related to the campaign were also strongly connected with the currently published polls, the reflections on the quality and level of the public debate, and the self-presentation of particular politicians. The substantive issues outside the scope of the campaign, concerning practical political problems, were clearly dominated by the general topics, not related to the current political decisions, in the discourse of the television programmes covered in the study. The main theme of broadcast journalism – tackled beyond the campaign – was the current, predominantly national politics of the individual parties, competing in the elections to the European Parliament in 2014. Often, party election broadcasts attended by the candidates to the European Parliament were used by the anchors as a tool for the discussion about national politics. Among the specific events that were discussed, we have indicated the problems with the declaration of assets (Aleksander Kwasniewski, the former President of Poland, Donald Tusk and Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the former

Prime Ministers of Poland), the crisis in Ukraine, the situation of flood risks and even the victory of Conchita Wurst at the 2014 Eurovision song contest. Interestingly, the European Union appeared as a central theme only when discussing the issue of a possible energy union and the further integration of European structures. Other topics or political EU-wide agenda were present to a much lower extent.

Autopoietic discourse of Polish current affair TV programmes and media logic during the elections – theoretical frame for conclusions

A strong autopoietic (according to the definition by Luhmann) and autoreferential electoral discourse means that the media are interested primarily in what they “produce,” in this case, in what they emit. Their narratives relate to themselves and the speeches made by the programme visitors constitute a point of reference for the next guests in the subsequent broadcasts. A great number of journalistic topics in the discussions were the issues concerning the course and dynamics of a political campaign, the manner of its coverage by the media as well as opinion polls. The essential and actual

decisions and processes of making politics were represented to a much lesser extent, which raises the question of the adequacy of the media discourse as a medium for actual knowledge about the political problems and not simply the knowledge about the rules of self-propelling and the autopoietic “game,” which is the election campaign. A visible, strongly autopoietic (Bechmann and Stehr, 2011) journalistic discourse is one which deals mostly with the election campaign itself (how it is conducted, what are the communication strategies of the parties, etc.) and, to a lesser extent, with the substantive issues. According to Bechmann and Stehr (2011: 144), the sector of news and features (including current affairs TV programmes) still corresponds most closely to our everyday expectations of that media function, which is connected with the reproduction of reality. Although information is offered here in a mode of neutrality and objectivity, a closer analysis reveals that mass media are not greatly interested in the truth, let alone the scientifically generated truth. Luhmann no longer proceeds on the basis of a causal relationship between mass media and the society, which seeks direct effects as if the media were deliberately seeking to manipulate. The media affect the public opinion, rather indirectly than directly, by framing particular topics. Each individual piece of information may be wrong, but the topic itself structures the public communication, providing the basis for further communication (Bechmann and Stehr, 2011: 146).

It is worth mentioning that an autopoietic system, however, can be also perceived in a different way – it does not transform inputs into outputs. Instead, it transforms itself into itself. What is meant by this is that the outputs of the system, those which it produces, are its own internal components and the inputs it uses are again its own

components (it does always require some elements from the environment and it does excrete waste). It is thus in a continual dynamic state of self-production (Mingers, 2002: 280).

Among the substantive issues, the national political issues dominated the discourse, eclipsing the issues at the European level. It also means that the majority of the current affairs TV programmes did not explain the problems of modern Europe in a clear and comprehensive way, as have been already mentioned before. As Luhmann argues, „[i]t is the topics of communication which ensure that the mass media, in spite of their operational closure, do not take off, do not take leave of society. Topics are an unavoidable requirement of communication. They represent communication’s other-reference. They organise communication’s memory. They gather contributions into complexes of elements that belong together, so that it can be discerned in the course of communication whether a topic is being retained and carried forward or whether it is being changed. At the level of topics, then, other-reference and self-reference are constantly being coordinated in relation to each other within the system’s own communication” (Luhmann, 2000: 12). It is clear that the media operate highly selectively, so that they do not function as a mirror and channel for the public, but they rather generate their own reality. Any piece of information can be accepted or rejected, creating the possibility of bifurcation in further communication without the need to assume an underlying plan or genuine reality (Bechmann and Stehr, 2011: 146).

Finally, we can agree once more with Niklas Luhmann, who says that “[w]e know so much about the mass media that we are not able to trust these sources”

(Luhmann, 2000:1). Luhmann describes the dual reality of the mass media system. This system occupies a special position in the social structure, providing information and reports to other systems and on other systems. This dual reality is based on two assumptions. The first assumption is the operational closure of the media system, in which the first reality is fabricated. In other words, the first reality of the media is the process of reproducing the media system and differentiating it from other systems. The second assumption is based on what the media perceive as real and what is then reconstructed as this reality. Therefore, the function of the media will be to block the societal self-observation, as well as the self-observation of other functional systems, by imposing their own interpretative framework of the reality. In other words, the media system construes the reality of other systems.

The question that arises from this is the following: how are the mass media capable of construing reality? The answer lies in the process of thematisation, through which the systems communicate. Topics constitute structures of the communication processes, based on generalisation. Furthermore, topics represent a reference that is alien to communication, which, on the basis of a system-external differentiation of the information/non-information code, enables the media system to operate and construe the reality.

Above all, a recursive public discussion of the topic is both a typical product of and a requirement for the continuation of mass media communication. What is more, it ensures that the public recursivity has a retroactive effect upon the communication in the environment of the mass media (Luhmann 2000: 12).

Approaching this concept from a narratological perspective, we can observe permanent self-reference as a key characteristic of the media content: all pieces of information are combined with each other in the process of autopoiesis, because the (potentially unlimited) mutual referencing is an immanent feature of media information.

The requirement of recursivity leads to these events being referred to in a subsequent news item – whether they are assigned a meaning that is typical or whether they are woven into a narrative context which can continue to be narrated. Occasionally, incidents that are reported offer an opportunity to report similar events and then to report a ‘series’ of events (Luhmann 2000: 33). The mass media form operationally closed systems that can be compared with other social systems, e.g., law, politics, science, business, etc. Secondly, the cognition itself is self-referential and closed: it can only occur in systems.

What does this really mean? It means that the mass media do not present an image of a reality that they have distinguished (this cannot actually be their function), but rather they themselves create the reality, which they communicate on a daily basis as news, reports, advertisements (the autopoietic relation). Although this reality is a manufactured reality that is formed in a selective manner—and we are all aware of this—it is a socially relevant reality and remains valid while giving us a picture of the actual reality, provided that we understand how it is produced, constructed, and consumed (Bechmann and Stehr, 2011: 142). What is more, the autopoietic systems are characterised both by a great deal of autonomy, since they are not dependent on external production processes, and by self-reference, since their organisation closes in on itself

and their structure is self-defined – it can be any so long as its supports autopoiesis (Mingers, 2002: 294; Maturana and Varela, 1987: 349).

It must be emphasised that the majority of the current affairs TV programmes covered in the study did not account for the contemporary problems of Europe in a comprehensive and competent way. In most cases, they did not make a diagnosis or a review of the Polish presence in the EU structures and they failed to fully explain the role and function of the European Parliament and other European agencies, such as the European Commission. What is more, they did not allow the Polish viewer-voters to look at the most important achievements and failures of the Polish MEPs. They generally did not define the most significant goals, challenges and opportunities faced by the Polish MEPs of the new term. Unfortunately, the Polish European campaign often resembles a national campaign, focused on such issues as home affairs, flood threats, or simple promotional activity of individual political star-locomotives (and their political parties), which largely dominates the current affairs TV programmes devoted to the EP elections.

This study confirmed a clear domination of the two main parties in Poland – the PO (Civic Platform) and the PiS (Law and Justice) – in the political discourse of the current affairs TV programmes. A group of non-party experts and politicians from these two parties were the main commentators on TV. Moreover, the biggest parties were highly exposed in the current affairs TV programmes during the last two weeks before the 2014 European Elections in Poland. They received the biggest support if we take into account the European Electoral results (a significant, strong r-Pearson correlation

between being exposed on television and achieving great electoral results). However, at the same time, the research presents – in the case of small parties – quite an opposite dependency. Namely, we noticed that the parties which were relatively highly exposed on television, such as the E+TR (Europa+Your Movement) and SP (Poland Comes First), did not exceed the electoral threshold. To make it even more complex, we took into consideration the fact that one of the smallest political parties – the Kongres Nowej Prawicy (Congress of The New Right Wing) – despite a relatively low exposure of their representatives on TV, achieved a good electoral result – 7.15 pct. However, it is worth mentioning that this party is well exposed in other media, mainly the Internet, thanks to its many young fans and activists (Sula, 2014).

Discussion – Autopoiesis of media and Second-Order Election

To sum up, according to the already mentioned concept of the European Elections as the Second-Order Elections (SOEs), the media does not help to break the “vicious” cycle of the second-order voting by offering domesticised themes during the campaign. In that sense, the EP elections fail as an instrument of democracy; namely, they fail to express the will of the European people on the European issues (Mair and Thomassen, 2010), and do not help to redress the EU democratic deficit, but rather they intensify it (Compare to Adam, Maier and Kaid, 2009; Peter and De Vreese, 2004). We have to remember that the process of the European elections is nationally framed and dominated by national and political issues and it naturally supports the autopoietic thematisation (self-referential themes of a campaign), acting to the detriment of

the most crucial aspects of the European elections.

The crux of this paper is that the more autopoietic a political discourse during the last two weeks before the elections is (according to the phenomenon of thematisation commented on in this paper), especially when it comes to the European elections, which seem to be the Second-Order Elections (De Vreese et al., 2006; De Vriese, 2009; Irwin, 1995; Norris and Reif, 1997; Weber, 2007), the more confused the viewers-voters feel about the main func-

tions, goals and institutions of the European Union (including the European Parliament). What is more, it generates a general social apathy and common discouragement for political participation in the elections (voter turnout in Poland during the last European Elections: 2004 (the first ones) – 20.87 pct, 2009 – 24.53 pct, 2014 – 23.83 pct. See: Tuman, 2008). This perspective should be one of the most challenging topics for researchers on the European Union, especially in times of the rising separatisms and national particularisms in almost every EU country.

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LENKIJOS TELEVIZIJOS AKTUALIJŲ LAIDŲ TEMIZAVIMAS PER 2014 METŲ EUROPOS PARLAMENTO RINKIMŲ KAMPANIJĄ: AUTOPOEZĖS LENKIJOS ŽINIASKLAIDOS SISTEMOJE

Tomasz Gackowski

S a n t r a u k a

Šio mokslinio darbo tikslas – ištirti Lenkijos viešųjų debatų dėl Europos Parlamento rinkimų kokybę, kitaip tariant, kaip televizijos aktualijų laidos vidutiniam žiūrovui-rinkėjui bandė paaiškinti sudėtingus su Europos Sąjunga susijusius klausimus ir Europos Parlamento funkcionavimo esmę. Atliekant tyrimą taikyta kokybinės ir kiekybinės turinio analizės metodika. Moksliniame darbe daugiausia dėmesio

skiriama temizavimo reiškiniui autoriaus apžvelgtose televizijos laidose. Diskutuojant žurnalistinėmis temomis daug dėmesio kreipta į tokius klausimus kaip šios kampanijos procesas ir dinamika, jos pateikimas žiniasklaidoje, apklausų rezultatai. Tyrimo rezultatai patvirtino, kad rinkimų diskursas buvo smarkiai autopoetiškas (N. Luhmanno teorijos terminas) ir savireferencinis.

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