

# Forum

03 (150) - 2023

Dziennikarzy

SPECIAL EDITION



## Freedom of speech in Central Europe



### Media about us, us in the media

Reality versus media image of Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Croatia in Europe in the eyes of journalists from these countries



**WACŁAW FELCZAK  
POLISH-HUNGARIAN  
COOPERATION  
INSTITUTE**



## An important and moving meeting

### We about our media image

Judging from passionate speeches and unanimous assessments of the foreign media by journalists and analysts from countries as different as Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Croatia, it was an important and interesting conference. We all exchanged thoughts on why the portrayal of the situation in our countries presented in the Western media is so different from what we know as reality.

At the Press Freedom Monitoring Centre of the Association of Polish Journalists, we discussed this issue many times, especially after encountering false information about the situation in Poland, so often repeated in the media of various European Union countries. That's why the title of the conference of 27 IX 2023 was very simple: 'Media on us, us on the media. Image versus reality of Central European countries and societies in the Western European media'.

I am very grateful to the Wacław Felczak Institute of Polish-Hungarian Cooperation, for its interest in the topic and support of the idea of organizing an international meeting on it. We gave an account of our efforts on the pages of a special issue in both Polish and English of the *Forum Dziennikarzy* magazine. It being the most prestigious periodical of the Association of Polish Journalists, the oldest and largest organization of journalists in Poland, gives me hope of reaching numerous media professionals.

The modern world does not exist without the omnipresent media shaping images and opinions about countries and nations. What is true and what is not in the mass of media messages, what correlates with reality and what is a mere media construct on a given country or a specific nation – these are the questions that patrons of today's media need answers to. The time has come to give it to them. I believe that our conference will initiate a series of regular meetings of journalists from countries in our part of Europe on this topic. I also trust that every year we will bestow an honorary Central European Freedom of Speech Award to distinguish the individuals best able to notice and describe problematic portrayals in the media. I thank all my colleagues from the W. Felczak Polish-Hungarian Cooperation Institute and, of course, the Association of Polish Journalists for their help and great commitment in organizing this conference and in publishing the magazine that you now have in your hands. I hope you find it an interesting read and I encourage you to share with me your concerns about the issues we have raised. Write me at [jolanta.hajdasz@sdp.pl](mailto:jolanta.hajdasz@sdp.pl). I will answer all your letters and I promise that we will do our best to continue these meetings in the future.

DR JOLANTA HAJDASZ, DIRECTOR OF THE PRESS FREEDOM MONITORING CENTRE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF POLISH JOURNALISTS (GMWP SDP)



### LEARNING

Scholarships and grants for Polish and Hungarian cooperation



### EDUCATION

Teaching Polish in Hungary and Hungarian in Poland



### BOOKS

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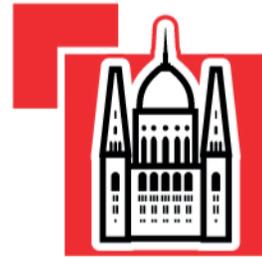
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From culinary skills to art.art



### EVENTS

Summer University in Krasiczyn and Summer Visegrad Academy in Budapest



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From left to right: ed. Krzysztof Skowroński, the winner of the Central European Freedom of Expression Award, Maciej Szymanowski, Director of the W. Felczak Polish-Hungarian Cooperation Institute, Jolanta Hajdasz, Vice-President of SDP, Director of CMWP SDP

## Central European Freedom of Speech Award for ed. Krzysztof Skowroński

initiator, founder, president and journalist of Radio Wnet granted by the SDP Press Freedom Monitoring Centre and the Waclaw Felczak Polish-Hungarian Cooperation Institute

‘Central European Freedom of Speech Award goes to ed. Krzysztof Skowroński for the idea behind and the creative implementation of the idea for a unique radio station – Radio Wnet – an ambitious radio station free of censorship that resembles a public radio station with a mission rather than a commercial radio station, which it is according to its operating licence. A radio that is able to unite people, countries and nations of Europe, that always finds time for discussion, reflection and polemics, that respects an ordinary person regardless of his or her country of origin or financial situation, that takes in young media enthusiasts and teaches them professional journalism.’

Jolanta Hajdasz, Director of the SDP Press Freedom Monitoring Centre  
Maciej Szymanowski, Director of the Waclaw Felczak Polish-Hungarian Cooperation Institute

### SPEECH BY KRZYSZTOF SKOWROŃSKI, THE WINNER OF THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN FREEDOM OF SPEECH AWARD

I accept the award with joy, humility and pride. Radio Wnet was founded in 2009 as an act of defiance against the absolute domination of a one-sided media narrative on what was happening in Poland and around the world. Of course, it was not the first to tell a different story about Poland and the world. It emerged as a simple, romantic journalistic challenge. But as it developed, we took a broader look beyond Poland. We decided to create what we loftily called a global radio network. We have studios in Taiwan, in Medellin, in Beirut, in Paris, in Zgorzelec, or Görlitz in Germany, in Vilnius, in Lviv. We cooperate very closely with a variety of journalists around the world.

This award is also presented to the radio station for its interest in Central Europe. On many occasions Radio Wnet covered the area from Estonia to Bucharest, focusing on politics, the Three Seas Initiative and on security, yet not forgetting the culture. In order to build something together, we need to know each other very well, to know our own history, tradition, our own composers, painters, writers. We are immersed not only in the present time, but we have to think about our identity and remember it in a historical context. All of this is what we talk about on the radio.





From left to right: Maciej Szymanowski, Krzysztof Skowroński

# Freedom of speech is our great strength

KRZYSZTOF SKOWROŃSKI TALKS TO DR HAB. MACIEJ SZYMANOWSKI – HUNGARIST, JOURNALIST AND DIPLOMAT, DIRECTOR OF THE WACŁAW FELCZAK POLISH-HUNGARIAN COOPERATION INSTITUTE.

## What was the reason for establishing of the Polish-Hungarian Cooperation Institute 5 years ago?

The Felczak Institute is one of the few institutions in Poland that work for cooperation between Central European countries, not through diplomacy, but by investing efforts and money, just like the Felczak Foundation in Budapest, in relations with youth, sports, culture, science, education and several other areas. Among others we publish textbooks that were last published in the 1950s. Generally, we deal in Central Europe.

Our website provides information mostly about Poland in Hungarian, about Hungary in Polish, and about Central Europe in English, e.g. what interesting things are happening in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. We published a mention of money transfers from January to September this year from the Czech Republic to the West, profiting Western companies impressive € 10 billion. We try to tackle these kinds of topics. Important not always and not for everyone, they matter for certain people in Poland who influence public life. Radio Wnet has been doing the same for years – the idea is to provide decisive people with reliable information, in this case from the Czech source.

## What did you manage to accomplish?

We provide around 100 scholarships. Even larger number of unsubsidized people have benefited from our universities. We managed to launch a Hungarian language course at the Catholic University of Lublin and a Polish

language course at the Ludovik University in Budapest at a time when Polish studies in Hungary closed down and Hungarian studies in Poland are experiencing difficulties. We published a few books, e.g. Andrzej Nowak's *History of Poland in Hungarian*; the first and, soon to come, the second volume of *Anatomy of Friendship, or the common Polish-Hungarian history* by prof. István Kovács. We are catching up on what was left undone in the last few decades.

## This means that the saying 'Pole, Hungarian, two brothers' is about to prove itself right.

Both countries so close but so estranged. Firstly, there is the language barrier. Secondly, we stopped visiting each other. Not only because there was no Via Carpatia, but we abandoned the north-south direction in favor of the west direction, which caused us, Poles, to lose touch with what is most important, what is happening in Central Europe, in this case in Hungary. It also works the other way around, so as an Institute we try to heal this situation. How? For example, in helping such initiatives as tax exemptions in Poland for young people up to 26 years of age or certain solutions regarding pro-family policy also appear in Hungary. In providing decisive people with solid information about why something was successful and why something else was not. In my opinion that serves not only Polish-Hungarian contacts, but also education.

## Is the Felczak Institute project an element of the Three Seas policy introduced by Law and Justice?



Unfortunately, this project is limited to very rigid Polish-Hungarian or, more recently, Visegrad relations, not yet the Three Seas relations. For this we need more money, opportunities and people. We struggle with this constantly. In Warsaw, it is not easy to find a person who speaks Hungarian fluently and vice versa, especially from the younger generation, which feels the rhythm of the country, has the energy and strength to act and work. We are catching up in some areas, but in general, as Poland, we have a big challenge ahead of us to significantly intensify our policy in Central Europe. That is if we want to play a role greater than that of an ordinary EU country.

**Now politics in Poland will change. So will Polish-Hungarian relations...**

Recently I have been asked extensively in Budapest and Prague what might happen in Warsaw? I don't know. But PiS's great merit is undoubtedly the fact that it has taken up this topic at various levels – from parliamentary diplomacy, through foreign policy and the policy of the Prime Minister – frequent Visegrad summits, consultations on many issues at the level of ministries. Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico put it very nicely in an interview, even before his victory: that in the case of each of the Visegrad countries, and especially Slovakia, cooperation in the region means that these countries are as strong as they would never be without this cooperation.

**Nonetheless, very good relations between the government of Good Change and the government of Prime Minister Orbán ended on February 24, when full-scale Russian aggression in Ukraine began.**

In the 9th year of this undeclared war put into practiced by Russia, the argument that Hungary had a different policy was used. The point is that Hungary believed from the beginning that Ukraine would be betrayed just as much as Hungary was in 1956, so it needed to reach an agreement with Russia. This position may be less popular in Berlin or Paris at the moment, but it is still on people's minds. I would very much like to see Ukraine not be betrayed by the EU. But I'm not sure about that. Moreover, of course, Hungarian-Ukrainian relations have not been the best for years,

mainly due to the Hungarian minority in Ukraine. Ukraine's policy also proves that Ukraine does not fully understand what is happening in Poland, Slovakia and Romania. The relations of all these countries with Ukraine are worse than a year ago.

**Does the 'split' of Polish and Hungarian policies towards Ukraine affect the activities of the Felczak Institute?**

Not at all, apart from the statements of some politicians; but politicians say things that are not always entirely honest and not always well-thought-out, regardless of the party they are loyal to.

***As a Pole, I wish that the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Polish Prime Minister traveled at least as often as Hungarian politicians to the capitals crucial for decision making in the world.***

**In Poland, public opinion was offended by the fact that the Hungarian Minister of Foreign Affairs traveled to Moscow and that Prime Minister Orbán greeted Putin. Here it meant that Hungary was involved in a completely different geopolitics.**

The German Chancellor and the French President went to Moscow and greeted each other many times more, even after the outbreak of the war. We have a bit of tabloidization of foreign policy. For example, everyone who deals with international journalism in Poland commented on the Orbán-Putin meeting, which I also do not approve of; but no one dealt with the ten contracts that Prime Minister Orbán signed with China in Beijing.

**This is also creating conflict between him and other European leaders. Polish idea of relations with China may also seem problematic.**

As a Pole, I wish that the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Polish Prime Minister traveled to the capitals crucial to the future of the world at least as often as Hungarian politicians do.

**What does Poland have to offer Hungary and what can Hungarians offer Poland?**

Poland above all should pursue an active policy within and outside of the European Union. We have been engaged

with Washington for many years – and this is a great credit to the president. But I don't remember the last time the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs went outside Europe. This is a very great weakness of Polish diplomacy. We have fewer diplomats than 30 years ago, although many more officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It used to be 1:1, today it is rather 3:1 to the detriment of diplomats. And there are consequences. Even assuming we're not yet a heavyweight, as my boxer dad would say, we should power up on the field and have strong partners outside. What Hungarians can offer above all is a Central European way of thinking, in terms of stabilizing of this region of Europe. Hungarians have been involved during the Serbo-Croatian war and the



aftermath in stabilizing relations in the Balkans. They offer much financial help, also to Ukraine. Little known fact in Poland, for many months Hungarian aid for Ukrainian refugees was even proportionally higher than the Polish. And it is still huge, because a lot of children study in Hungarian schools and Ukrainian soldiers are offered medical treatment. They also provide a lot of help to Serbia and Croatia.

**During the Good Change, Poland and Hungary were one in the opinion of the European Union. It is about to change. Hungary will stand alone in the EU.**

There is no indication of this. We live, as I say, in a certain tabloidization of

foreign policy. There are, for example, countries that received practically no funds from the KPO Stabilization Pact. They don't apply for it because they don't want to. And we don't even know about it in Poland. The Netherlands and Sweden did not take any money. Germany has recently taken something, but they don't really want it either. Division is one thing, what is actually happening is another. We are on the eve of the Union trying to move away from the principle that all Member States are equal. And we'll see what the reaction will be. I think it may not be as easy as some in the European Parliament think. Many countries and their leaders are now mulling it over.

### **Where does Viktor Orbán's popularity come from?**

**V**iktor Orbán is the leader of a country that had to emerge from a very deep crisis after the post-communist rule. First of all, and Hungarians appreciate this very much, the times of poverty and estrangement are over: when, for example, Viktor Orbán came to power, three of the greatest nouveau riche, resembling our Urban, were ministers in the left-wing government. He is a skillful politician and no one doubts that he is trying to implement the policy of his own country, which, I agree, is not always consistent with our interests, but he does what he is paid for.

### **What is Orbán's skill?**

The fact that he is still a young, clearly well-read politician, travels around the world, meets with various people – from Donald Trump to outstanding intellectuals. He has his own opinion and is not afraid to defend it. This is rather an exception in today's world. If we made a list of top-ranking politicians who read books, Viktor Orbán would be among them, and Jarosław Kaczyński would definitely be among them. Probably a few more names, but there wouldn't be a huge crowd. In my opinion, this is a problem in general, political class. Polish politicians do not travel, do not study, do not appear at conferences abroad, because

they simply cannot, do not read, do not know certain things and are afraid. They prefer to come to a Polish television or radio studio and say things that seem very wise and innovative to them. That's not how the world works.

**Is it true that the media in Hungary is monopolized by Prime Minister Orbán?**

Some journalists say so. To say that there is no freedom of speech in Hungary is a slap in the face to German capital involved in, for example,

*To say that there is no freedom of speech in Hungary is a slap in the face to German capital involved in, for example, RTL television and 7 channels in Hungary. It's like saying that TVN is practicing pro-PiS propaganda.*

RTL television and 7 channels in Hungary. It's like saying that TVN is practicing pro-PiS propaganda. In Hungary, as in many other countries, especially in our part of Europe, there is full pluralism in the media sphere with a certain dominance of the left-liberal option, which we also know from Poland. I don't know if someone from France would say about their country that pluralism and freedom of opinion are so good. It is Poland's great strength that we have media pluralism. And I greatly appreciate Radio Wnet as a reliable source of information from the world. In this respect you have no competition in the Central European category.

**Let's get back to Polish-Hungarian interests. Ideological we agree. But is there any Polish-Hungarian project profitable for both Poles and Hungarians?**

Yes, we carry joint expansion in Central Europe. For example, Orlen is buying more gas stations in Austria and Germany thanks to the agreement with the Hungarian MOL. It's a great success because it hasn't happened before, but it's not outstanding. Non-Polish and non-Hungarian companies are still responsible for the majority of Polish-Hungarian turnover. Companies based on domestic capital are smaller and medium-sized ones that 'stagnate' rather than develop.

**We talked about what you have managed to do, but we did not mention youth meeting in Krasiczyn.**

**N**ot only in Krasiczyn, also in Budapest, and not only the youth, Hungarian, Polish, Slovak and Czech, but also editors, opinion leaders, politicians, experts from very different fields. All of us in Central Europe live with an inferiority complex. We've been experiencing an economic growth for almost 30 years, a standard of living undoubtedly higher than that of our parents' generation, and yet we have an inferiority complex towards the West. So, at our universities and during summer schools, we also try to create opportunities to talk and meet people who came from humble backgrounds and have made a career; to talk about what they owe it to. As it turns out determination is the driving force in life.



**Poland's great strength lies in media pluralism. I greatly appreciate Radio Wnet as a reliable source of information from the world. In this respect they have no competition in the Central European countries.**

**What do you believe is the future of the Felczak Institute?**

**F**uture looks good, I believe. We are supervised by the Prime Minister's office. But I don't foresee any disturbance, because it would be against the Polish *raison d'état*. The Institute had a very difficult time, i.e. it was established much later than our counterpart, the foundation in Budapest. We bought the first desk, the first kettle, and we already had an inspection from the Supreme Audit

Office. In the first 4 years, 3 years passed under constant inspections. So I guess we are well prepared for the next turbulence. There are only 10 of us. We do not have great resources at our disposal, but our capital is people and relations.

**Many prosperous years!** 10-15 years will be plenty, that's how long Central Europe, including Poland, needs to strengthen itself, catch the wind in its sails and start influencing the fate of Europe. Now it's our turn.



Wojciech Surmacz, President of the Polish Press Agency (PAP)

WOJCIECH SURMACZ

# Freedom of speech is sacred to us

**Wojciech Surmacz** is an investigative and economic journalist, President of the Polish Press Agency since 2018.

I am glad that we will be talking about freedom of speech today and that I can expect a discussion at a very high level. And a lot of things need discussion.

A few months ago the Polish Press Agency was visited by the Swiss media. Around 20 their representatives, that is. They were chief editors, heads, and the head of the Swiss Press Agency. Freedom of speech was the chief topic. They came to the Polish Press Agency after a visit in most-

unthinkable for a very, very long time after 1989. I tried to explain all this to the Swiss journalists. And I keep explaining this to our colleagues from other agencies, particularly Western ones. This is a paradox and it is sad, but I always explain to them humbly that they teach us freedom of speech but fail to understand that we had done virtually nothing else than fight for freedom of speech after World War II. And that freedom of speech is sacred to us. Those liberal jour-

*I always explain to them humbly that they teach us freedom of speech but fail to understand that we had done virtually nothing else than fight for freedom of speech after World War II. And that freedom of speech is sacred to us.*

ly liberal, or opposition, media in Poland. They asked us questions of why freedom of speech in Poland is at such a low level. What is happening that it is getting worse and worse? I listened to this humbly, but eventually I asked them for the sources of their information.

‘This is what liberal media journalists told us. Besides, there are freedom of speech rankings in which Poland keeps going down.

I asked why they did not visit the conservative media. We have such in Poland. Very strong they are, and thank God for that. The situation was dire in 2010–2012. Thanks to such initiatives as Michał Karnowski’s ‘W Sieci’, now the ‘Sieci’ weekly and ‘wPolityce’, ‘Niezależna’ or ‘Do Rzeczy’, we have a really strong conservative section in the market, which was

nalists – mostly over twenty years old – don’t know about communism and for them freedom of speech may have a slightly different meaning.

Today, Poland is one of the countries in Europe where said freedom of speech is really true. A hundred-percent freedom of speech is nowhere to be found, but in Poland it ranks as one of the highest in Europe. I am saying this with full conviction and ownership because I was born in communist times and I know how it was, I know how censorship worked. Accusing Poland of censorship today, particularly by the Western media, is not justified.

I am speaking here for the Polish Press Agency, which is a member of the European Alliance of News Agencies, organisation uniting 32, basically all, press agencies from Europe.



Jolanta Hajdasz, Vice-President of SDP, Director of CMWP SDP, Wojciech Surmacz, President of the Polish Press Agency (PAP)

We are often reproached, especially by Western agencies, that we are a state agency. My answer is: yes, we are a state agency, but we are also a commercial company, we live off the market. State subsidies are around 20% of our revenues, so we need to operate as an ordinary commercial enterprise. And this is how we do operate.

We have taken very, very huge strides in communication with the Western World since 2015. We are friends with journalists from Ireland and the United Kingdom, who in 1990s were still taught about Poland as a part of the Soviet Union. According to their textbooks, we were a republic of the Soviet Union and we were treated accordingly. I have noticed a dramatic change since 2015. And contrary to what is being said: that we are isolated and that we don't have friends in the West – we have huge respect, before all. In these days, the Polish Prime Minister and President do not have to impose himself on the Western media. They are oftentimes invited and interviewed about certain topics. There is no

doubt that Poland is seen in a much different light than before 2015. And the said narratives are being told nonetheless.

In 2022, right after Russian's attack on Ukraine – although contrary to popular belief, the war in Ukraine broke out in 2014 – I applied for exclusion of the TASS Russian News Agency from EANA, accusing them of publishing falsehoods about the aggression against Ukraine. Their dispatches and information presented it as a special operation against the Nazis etc. After three months, an extraordinary general meeting was convened in Sarajevo at my request. We voted for and against TASS exclusion. Only 6 out of 26 present agencies voted for exclusion. I won't say which as the voting was by secret ballot. Despite our hard work, we failed.

There was a dinner after the voting. The head of one of the largest Western press agencies, sitting at a table next to me, driven by wine-induced courage asked me, 'Why are those Ukrainians fighting like that? What are they fighting for? They should surrender and give up that

part to Russians. Why all this? If Russians want it, let them take it. There will be peace in Europe.

Three hours of lecturing, explaining the Polish and Ukrainian history, telling about our difficult history and, obviously, explaining what Russia and the Soviet Union have been to us, and so on and so forth. Let's assume that I convinced him. We're leaving the restaurant and heading for the hotel room. We went into the elevator and as he was leaving at his floor, he asked me one last question – like in the 'Columbo' series, 'Tell me one more thing, don't get upset, but was this Auschwitz camp really Polish?'

I told him, 'I don't even know what to tell you. I don't think we have a lot of time for discussion. I'm inviting you to Poland: I'll cover the ticket and hotel costs and we'll go. We'll take you to Auschwitz. We'll leave you alone at the gate. We'll wait, you'll come back and then we can talk.'

An opportunity arose literally two months later as we hold the 'Media of the Future' international conference every year. We invited him. I offered him to fly in a day earlier and visited Auschwitz before the conference. Alright. Well, there

came the day of the event. He went in, stopped in front of me, started to cry and said, 'Say nothing, this will stay with me till the end of my life. I am deeply sorry.'

You would be really shock if I told you where did he come from. This happened a year ago.

**At every chance, I am going out of my way to make our friends from the widely understood West realise that our notion of freedom of speech and censorship is much further-reaching than theirs. They have never lived in communism; the closest they got to it is when they read about it.**

I am telling this example to make you all realise that I'm not talking about Poland only. Representative of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Croatia are here with us. I believe we are in very similar situations. There's still a lot of work ahead of us. On every plane, even in individual, private relations, we need to keep on working and reversing the problems of several dozen years of life under communist rule. At every chance, I am going out of my way to make our friends from the widely understood West realise that our notion of freedom

of speech and censorship is much further-reaching than theirs. They have never lived in communism; the closest they got to it is when they read about it at the time. Now they can read – surely in their textbooks or various historical studies in their countries – about what happened then, but they have never experienced it and they never will. ■



## About us without us

### True and invented images of Poland, Czechia, Hungary and Croatia in the media

MODERATOR: DR JOLANTA HAJDASZ

#### SPEAKERS:

**ED. TOMASZ SAKIEWICZ**  
editor-in-Chief of *Gazeta Polska*, *Gazeta Polska Codziennie*  
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**BÉLA BAUER PHD**  
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**ONDŘEJ ŠMIGOL**  
columnist of the *Echo24* website  
(Czechia)

#### Tomasz Sakiewicz

We are talking about stereotypes and the invention of these stereotypes about Central European countries. 1990s, since we existed – as the first title in our group of 12 titles was *Gazeta Polska* – we have devoted a lot of time and effort debunking stereotypes. Back in the days of the late Jacek Kwieciński, head of the foreign department, there was the *Dosyć* ('Enough' – translator's note) campaign. It was a campaign dedicated to explaining that it was not the Poles who established the concentration camps, but the Germans. In the 1990s, there was the first wave of attempts to shift the responsibility for German crimes onto Poles. Consequently, many, many stereotypes were created that were intended to harm

either Poles or other nations of the region, and they, of course, have various causes. German political strategy in this respect is ruthless. Besides, it very often coincides with the Russian strategy of constructing its own version of history. This is intended to exonerate Moscow and Berlin from their responsibility for World War II. Shifting the responsibility or sharing it with other nations.

But the real core of this problem is business. The business interests of the European Union's main

governors, who, in welcoming the new countries of Europe – and these are the countries whose representatives are gathered here – realised that a certain balance of power had been upset. This balance has always been quite fragile. German domination certainly had already existed, but another element was added. If the countries of Central Europe suddenly began to formulate their demands

Since the enlargement of the European Union, a process of pacification of Central European countries has been underway. It consists primarily in proving that these countries are inferior.

in a strong, conscious manner, proportional to their actual power, they could upset this existing balance in the European Union and create some kind of a new political arrangement. This was not something desired, especially not by Germany. These countries had to be pacified. Therefore, it can be said that enlargement of the European Union, a process of pacification of Central European countries

has been underway. It consists primarily in proving that these countries are inferior. The proof of inferiority being that they are poorer. And they are poorer as a result of, among other things, the actions of the main country in the European Union, Germany, which invaded a large number of other countries and caused its other ally, Soviet Russia, to occupy half of Europe. And this is no longer included in this narrative. Firstly, we are inferior, and as inferior we have more limited rights. Secondly, they

had democracy, and we did not. Well, we did not because it was taken away from us first by the Nazis and then by the Communists, but indeed, it was absent during that period. Nonetheless, they are now the better ones, they are culturally superior.

**T**hese are not my words, I am quoting a representative of the German equivalent of the Polish Constitutional Court, who said that they are allowed more because they are culturally superior. Now, let me leave aside that this is a historical absurdity, because the traditions of Polish democracy go back to the Renaissance and even the beginning of the Middle Ages, while Germans discovered democracy with the election of Hitler. Such are the origins of the democracy of the German Weimar Republic. In some German states this democracy had previously existed to a limited extent, but the de facto first product of German democracy was Adolf Hitler. And these are their democratic traditions. As you can see, history can be rewritten. Especially when you have enough power and resources and a certain idea of how to write it. This is the reason why Germans see themselves as a nation responsible for setting standards.

The European Union operates as a kind of theocracy: on the one hand, there are the laws that nations make as a result of agreements called treaties. These treaties are quite general in nature. In fact, I don't think anyone has ever read them all because it's impossible. The Lisbon Treaty consists of



Tomasz Sakiewicz, Editor-in-Chief of *Gazeta Polska*, *Gazeta Polska Codziennie* and *Telewizja Republika*

tens of thousands of pages with annexes. No one knows this law well, including the specialists, and certainly not those who apply it. Therefore, there must be standards by which certain rules are chosen, and these are the so-called EU standards. And who sets the EU standards? Well, there is no legislator. EU standards have the character of a revelation.

The EU governance system is intended to serve several purposes. One of the most important is keeping the Central European countries in check. That is to say, that their collective power could not counterbalance any of the forces in the European Union, nor could it cause one of the European Union's major powers – be it Germany or France – to cooperate with them strongly enough to exclude the other and cause that one to suddenly move into opposition.

And therefore the creation of certain types of stereotypes is an important element. They provide an alibi for those who do so. Basically, we are dealing with evil. With something one would colloquially call dirty tricks. How to make them clean? By describing them nicely. So, it is necessary to create stereotypes that give an alibi. That's what the foundations are for, that's what the independent media of the democratic states are for, to create such stereotypes and to pursue the interests of particular countries or groups in the European Union.

Certainly, some of these stereotypes do derive from history and experience to some extent, but they have found new meanings and applications already in today's political game. They cannot be separated from the current political game of the respective powers. These are not always financial interests, but ideological interests as well. Some of the European Union's powers pursue a certain project of a leftist revolution. The countries of Europe have to adapt, because if they don't, they are clearly deemed backward, undeveloped and not really entitled to any discussion. Yes, there are also such norms of revelatory nature.

So we find ourselves in a situation where we first need to diagnose what we are dealing with at all, because our societies are falling prey to a total fraud. We are being bashed and end up explaining ourselves, despite the fact that these norms that we do not adhere to – which are not

really there – are selected to suit the needs of the current discussion. Please note how the situation with immigrants is developing. First the government had to explain why it didn't want to accept immigrants, and then why it did. Meanwhile, TV stations fighting for tolerance are running around Warsaw looking for people of other skin colours to prove that the government is letting in immigrants. These norms have simply no validity, they are a mere element of the fight for current interests.

### Paweł Lisicki

**L**et me start with an anecdote about how difficult it is to break through with information about Poland to the Western media. In 2018 or 2019, two journalists from the largest Spanish daily magazine, *El País*, came to see me. We started talking about the political situation in Poland and what was happening here. Of course, a whole lot of standard questions were asked: is democracy being violated? How does the opposition work? And aren't they being persecuted? A very calm conversation of this sort. At one point the journalist said: 'We have been informed that militias have appeared in Poland.' At first I thought I misunderstood her English. Then I started asking what militia she was referring to and where she got this information. 'After all, it is common knowledge that the ruling party has now established militias or other armed and military groups.' How come I haven't heard

about it? So I ask: 'And where did you hear about these militias?' 'On Czerska.' That is, at the headquarters of the *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

It appeared the discussion was about the Territorial Defence Forces established by the Law and Justice (PiS) party at that time. That is, not a militia to crack down on the opposition, but a form of, say, National Guard to strengthen the country's

***The idea of building societies anew and blowing up the status quo emerged on a large scale more or less in the late 1960s and 1970s in the West, and has reached Poland with increased force recently.***

territorial defence, which is what I was obviously trying to explain to them. We then talked about it for an hour or two. The following day, an editorial comment in *El Pais* said: 'Kaczynski like Franco. Black militias prowling the streets of Warsaw.' So I concluded that the opportunity to communicate a slightly different message was very limited.

What is the reason for that? Certainly, it must to some extent derive from stereotypes. The stereotypes themselves, in my opinion, largely stem from the fact that Western media in general adhere to the left-liberal values. They serve as a means of introducing the four-element ideology that has taken over much of the modern West. These elements are very clear. The first is immigrationism, i.e. the belief that national borders should be abolished, and as many migrants as possible should be allowed in, preferably from cultural

circles as distant from Europe as possible: from Africa or the Middle East. They will become an instrument for dismantling what is still left of the old European culture and civilisation. Immigrationism has been promoted virtually 1960s, 1970s in the old European Union and there are obvious attempts to transfer it to the rest of Central Europe. That is, immigrationism is the first point that lies behind

the idea of changing the face, changing the form of Europe or the European Union as it currently exists. The idea of building societies anew and blowing up what already exists appeared on a large scale around the late 1960s and 1970s in the West, and has been reaching Poland with increased force recently.

**T**he second point, a very important one, and a new one in the sense that it was previously unknown in the European Union: climate change. It is the second ideological element characteristic of the European Union as a whole, with particular emphasis on the central states. By the central states I mean Germany, France, the old European Union countries. It is a belief that the ongoing climate change is harmful and extremely dangerous, that it is human-made and that states have the means to address and stop it. In other words, humans control the planet



## BÉLA BAUER

REPRESENTATIVE OF THE INDEPENDENT THINK TANK  
SZÁZADVÉG (HUNGARY)

### Our parts of Europe do not understand each other

**O**ur debate concerns stereotypes, among other things. However, we must remember that these stereotypes did not arise today, but a long time ago. What do we, in our part of Europe, think about one another? As for the attitude towards alcohol in Central Europe, it is considered something natural. Specifically, we associate Czechs with beer. Of course, it all depends on whether a given citizen has been in Prague or not. When it comes to the media, for example, there is little talk about the Czech Republic in Hungary. If the Czech Republic appears in the press at all, it is in the context of whether they agree with us on European issues or not. Then the liberal press writes about it. Same happens when the Czech Republic attacks the current Orbán government, for instance. Yet another example: people in Hungary – especially those over 60 – do not say 'Czech Republic', but 'Czechoslovakia' or even 'Slovakia'. They mix the names up. This too can be called stereotypes.

And how do Hungarians think about Poles, about Poland?

There is a certain social group that remembers the films made by Wajda, although this group is narrow. In fact, the stereotypes about Poland in Hungary are that Poles have conservative values. In many cases we think the same, Hungarians and Poles; and to widen the perspective even more – the Visegrad Four. Currently, the Hungarian social thinking does not understand a number of issues; neither the liberal left nor the conservatives understand the situation. We also do not fully understand these historical events, which may possibly cast a shadow on our countries.

So if we are talking about stereotypes, I would go back to the 1980s. Poles came to Hungary to trade near the Budapest Eastern Railway Station. You could buy a number of things from Poles at a cheap price. True, but in the meantime a whole generation of Hungarians had grown up who remember perfectly the political changes that took place in Poland. Then there was a generation that often went to Poland, so Poland was a destination country for Hungarian youth in the 1980s. However, our today's youth does not consider Poland a destination country anymore.

**Stereotypes about Poland in Hungary are such that Poles have conservative values. In many cases we think the same, Hungarians and Poles; and to widen the perspective even more – the Visegrad Four.**

and the economic system must therefore be adapted to serve the purpose of climatism. And this is the second point, treated by the European central states almost as if it were a form of religion. It is not something that is discussed. The sources and course of the changes and their effects are not really discussed, they are accepted as dogma. This entails a concrete attempt to force other countries, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, to impose new regulations related to a new form of economy that is extremely harmful to those countries.

The third characteristic feature of the new European ideology is genderism. In fact, it would be more appropriate to speak of a Western ideology – because it is not only, unfortunately, the European Union; exactly the same ideological element can be observed especially in a sort of centre of the Atlantic world, which

is the United States. And if we take a closer look at the ideology followed by the American Democrats led by the current president, it is not at all different from what we can observe in the European Union. Genderism is the belief that by means of state, legal and social measures, it is possible to bring up or create a human being in a somewhat new way, denying his or her rootedness in the existing reality. For instance, in biology, in what

**If we take a closer look at the ideology followed by the American Democrats led by the current president, it is not at all different from what we can observe in the European Union.**

is inviolable, i.e. the gender division. In what now seems to be subject to constant manipulation, meaning, for example, the so-called equalisation of sexual orientations.

**I**mmigrationism, climatism and genderism are three instruments leading to what? Here is where that final element comes in: globalism, or the belief that the existence of nation states and national identities must be abolished. To bring about a single super-state machine that controls everyone in the spirit of

progress and in the spirit of development. It is easy to see that if we confront the aforementioned elements with the current EU policy towards the rest of the European Union, they are all there.

The first, immigrationism, is an attempt to force these countries to forcibly relocate refugees or migrants. These are migrants called refugees, obviously to make

it easier to impose. Immigrationism is precisely reflected in the decisions taken by the European Commission and the attempts to impose them on individual countries. Then there is the attempt to impose climatism on these countries. The famous 'Fit for 55' and the consequent attempts to force these states to make decisions that are clearly detrimental to their societies, such as the abandonment of combustion cars, the introduction of



Paweł Lisicki, Editor-in-Chief of the weekly magazine *Do Rzeczy*

compulsory zero-emission certificates for homes, etc. All of this fits into the climate package prepared by the European Union.

**G**enderism – it is easy to see the degree to which this is even declared by Ms Ursula von der Leyen in September 2019 in her so-called State of the Union address, when she said that it cannot be the case that someone who is a parent in one country is not a parent in another country of the Union. In other words, we have a precise definition of this aspiration that the European Union is trying to impose on all of its Member States.

Finally, there is globalism, that is, the element of destruction or dismantling of nation states, very strongly explicated or expressed by Chancellor Olaf Scholz in its simple form: an end to the right of veto, meaning the introduction of the so-called qualified majority at first, and then perhaps the simple majority, which would mean that nation

states lose their primary instrument for blocking globalist elements or inclinations on the part of the European Union. Additionally, the current international situation is being exploited here, where Chancellor Scholz – and not only him, as this also applies to the Brussels elite – has set a condition: enlargement of the Union can only take place alongside the abandonment of the right of veto.

The ideological source of immigrationism, climatism, genderism and globalism is the reason for a large part of Western media to present the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in such a negative way. Not all of them – just to be clear – but those, with particular emphasis on Poland and Hungary, who have enough strength and persistence and enough commitment to their national identity to oppose this great project. It is no coincidence that all the negative opinions do not apply to Central Europe as such. There is a very clear division here. The bad ones are Hungary and Poland because they disobey and undermine the project with regard to these four elements that I have mentioned.

By undermining I mean the actions of the government. Of course, I have often criticised the Polish government for being too compliant with what Brussels says in some aspects – especially with regard to climatism and genderism. But I am also well aware that, if you look at it from the European perspective, even these limited and, in my opinion, often too timid actions of the Polish

authorities were still something unbearable, which had to be overcome and resulted in an alternative government, more favourable to these solutions.

This, in my opinion, is the source. Of course, it is important to strive to demonstrate that our reality is different than it appears to many in

***The narrative about the alleged violation of the rule of law, the destruction of democracy and human rights, is inappropriate and untrue. The implication is that Western media follow very specific ideological and political interests.***

the West. That the narrative of the alleged violation of the rule of law, the continued destruction of democracy and human rights, is incorrect and untrue. However, one must realise that this does not result from either ignorance, lack of knowledge or a nonchalant approach to reality. The reason is that Western media pursue very specific ideological and political interests and will continue to do so as they have done.

Last thing. How could we try to deal with this? This is no great achievement. At our weekly newspaper, we established a foundation that runs a website exclusively in English. It is called sovereignty.pl, and we publish a significant part of our articles in English in order to break down this barrier. I very much believe in this venture and would like to see it grow. I am also very happy when other Polish media do this, because they do it too. However, I am well aware that the problem is not

the ability to access other information, but the ideological bias resulting from the aforementioned issues.

To conclude: our trouble is also that this is not just a problem, as many in Poland think, of Europe or of European pressure. If we listen to the statements of, for example, the current US Ambassador to Warsaw, Mark

Brzezinski, they point to exactly the same principles I have been talking about. This is the exact same fight for human rights there, the fight for the rule of law, support for the climate system and genderism. That is to say, unfortunately, we are confronting a gigantic Atlanticist ideology and we have to defend ourselves as much as possible and as much as we can manage.

### **Michał Karnowski**

The focus we are witnessing in our region is important. However, we must remember that we are part of something bigger. If we look at what is happening in the US market, we have a sense of a copy of the mechanisms, the tools used to maintain dominance, to humiliate the opponent, to exclude them, to take away their legitimacy. We probably all share similar experiences. I remember a young journalist visiting from



Michał Karnowski, journalist, columnist of the weekly magazine Sieci, and wPolityce.pl website

Germany, I think he had good will, and he sent in an article that wasn't particularly right-wing or favouring the ruling party of Law and Justice (PiS), but it showed that there were two sides. I met him two days later. With regret, he told me: it was pointed out to me that I had misdiagnosed the situation. I think we are dealing with not just a bias, but something more than that. It is a rigid

control of media coverage. In Germany, for example – shockingly for us – the control is powerful and always steered by the government. Yes, the political power in Germany has a much greater impact on German media than the political power in Poland has even on those considered

**We are dealing with more than just a bias. It is clearly more than that. It is a rigid control of media coverage. In Germany, for example – shockingly for us – the control is powerful and always steered by the government.**

to be government-controlled or pro-government media. But just to try and structure the issue: it seems to me that we are facing an attack on the countries of our region, on our environments, in three areas.

Firstly: the institutions of the state, the media, all sorts of organisations. Let us note that every form of subjectivity that exists and functions here, from state structures to journalistic organisations, is all undermined, criticised, attacked. It is all being deprived of its legitimacy, it is being invalidated, it is being declared irrelevant. Institutions

are undoubtedly a form that simply enables the communities, societies, people, commonwealths to act and be effective. Without institutions, we are but a mass. And these institutions are very precisely attacked and denied.

Secondly: Berlin, Brussels or Paris are very careful to ensure that we do not develop any platform to bring us together. The Visegrad Group is mocked, ridiculed and undermined. From the Polish perspective, every time a change of government takes place in Czechia or Slovakia, it brings hope in the EU that perhaps this government will no longer participate in the Visegrad Group, that it will dissent. Sometimes these hopes come true.



Jolanta Hajdasz, Director of CMWP SDP,  
Vice-President of SDP

Furthermore: the Trimarium. You can talk to Polish diplomats to find out how much effort German diplomacy has put into torpedoing the Three Seas Initiative, so that this project would not work, so that there would be no further steps. Because the Trimarium was established, then the Three Seas Fund was created, and it would be advisable to go further, to create institutions within the European Union, because the Trimarium is an internal EU project. But brakes were being applied. Some of it worked, some of it didn't, but a lot was done to prevent the Three Seas Initiative from succeeding. So the attack on our organisational forms is very strong.

This attitude results in an attack on our economy, on our prosperity, on our industry, on our production capacity, on our innovation. We have repeatedly experienced this kind of targeted attack on some Polish products, on Polish activities. Not

to mention the regulatory game being played by the lobbyists and the Western governments. I recently had a very interesting discussion at the Economic Forum in Karpacz. Some of the leading Polish businessmen were there, but the ones who really produce: windows, chemical products; companies that are really present on the European market, present in the East as well. One of the participants in this panel was a very important Polish journalist, a liberal-left Editor-in-Chief of an important newspaper with such a profile. And he delivered a fiery speech. He said: the free market will solve everything, no regulations, no games of this sort. We enter European markets, there the rules are the same for everyone and we can push on and be successful. I think that these entrepreneurs would have applauded him even ten years ago, but today they opposed. They said: You don't know what is going on! You don't know how we are being cut out of individual markets by nation states or the European Commission with various regulatory tricks, with rule changes, with sometimes even extremely vulgar administrative barriers. So here we are also being hit very precisely.

The third element is an attack on our identity, our self-confidence, which of course also originates from pride in our history, from the feeling that we can distribute prestige. All the elements that distribute prestige, dignity, some kind of recognition among nation states or in our community are being undermined,



## TOMASZ SAKIEWICZ

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF GAZETA POLSKA, GAZETA POLSKA  
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### Dogmatism of the European Union

It is said that, for instance, European justice is an EU standard. And European justice requires forced relocation. What does it come from? Nothing, I am afraid. Even though there is no such provision, the standards are strictly applied. And it is applied to such an extent that Poland is threatened with sanctions if we do not accept relocation. This means that there are standards of revealed law nature as they are not the result of agreements, democratic elections or even decisions of overt institutions. They are just ordered out of a sudden. Someone says that Poland has broken an EU standard. There is the Court of Justice that will rule that Poland has actually broken that standard. And then sanctions will be applied.

The European Union is home to dogmatism where concepts are theocratic, or indisputable. When something stems from revelation, there is no arguing with it as the source of revelation is above all law. Many EU concepts are established in such a manner – by atheists, by the way – that they bear the marks of religious dogma. On the flip side, they seem to be invalid if they harm the interests of those who preach them. In other words: you can sometimes let immigrants in and sometimes not. And a certain structure of the European Union that emerges from all this serves mainly the interests of the largest country, that is Germany. Let me now refer to history. The Second German Reich was based on the fact that even though all the countries united under the emperor's rule had a Reichstag in which they approved laws, Prussia had the decisive vote and the vetoing power. And they – meaning the Germans – want to recreate the political structure of the Second Reich. This means that this time, yes, all countries will be able to vote on various issues, but Germany will enjoy the vetoing and deciding vote. But in order to justify this undemocratic system, devoid of the foundations of what the EU was – a democratic Europe of nations, there must be values that will be announced to us. So if we communicate that, say, we do not want forced immigrants, higher values will be invoked based on which we will have to accept them. Otherwise we will be punished. And just as the will of the German Emperor, elected by God Himself, was the higher value there, here the highest values will involve certain truths that will be revealed to us by those who govern the Union.

**Many EU concepts are established in such a manner – by atheists, by the way – that they bear the marks of religious dogma. On the other hand, they seem to be invalid if it harms the interests of those who preach them.**



From left to right: Tomasz Sakiewicz, Paweł Lisicki, Michał Karnowski, Béla Bauer, Ondřej Šmigol

attacked. Only the European, i.e. German awards, only the medals awarded in Berlin or France are supposed to have power, be strong and be recognised as legitimate. Everything else is undermined, so I think we are being very precisely struck here at our belief that we represent something. History is, of course, a special field. In the case of Poland, our national pride is being attacked very precisely here. How we got through the terrible time of World War II, fighting from the first to the last day on the right side; how we then dealt with Communism. Today, for example, in how we defend our borders. All of this comes with terrible accusations, the idea that we are vile, disgusting, have never behaved with dignity and have always made supposedly bad choices.

Sometimes I am tired, for example, of conferences on the Church

where we will talk about how things are terribly wrong. We all know that it is terribly wrong in many areas. But what to do about it? This is a task we cannot abdicate. Above all, we must realise that these tools serve to control us. If we accept this diagnosis, many things become understandable. This violence that is being used against us, this attack becomes less effective if we put a name to it: yes, they are all about control. These are the tools they use to keep us in line.

**H**ow should this be countered? I believe that in each of these areas that I have mentioned, we simply need to be very active. Do whatever we can, self-organise, create communities of all kinds. This conference also serves as an example of such action. I look around the room and I know many people. We know each other, we have seen each

other before, including the Felczak Institute. I think this is a huge credit to the editorial collaboration. Presumably, had we met 10–15 years ago, there would not have been such familiarity, such contacts, such channels, such forms of exchange of experience. This is a big thing: to create structures, to organise ourselves, to continue the Visegrad Group and the related activities, to be able to overcome certain differences. I think the Poles and Hungarians have managed to achieve this recently. We have a lot of differences with regard to the war, but nevertheless our ties, our relationships have not been broken.

It is necessary to build cooperation with those countries that perhaps do not yet have so many elites to join here, or we simply do not know each other, which is more likely. Keep an eye on your own institutions, including the media, which is extremely important, but – of course – fight economically. Here it is fair to say that time is on our side.

They can see this and that is why there is such nervousness there. Each year we gain, we too become richer, more and more confident. But I would say that the most important element, a red line of sorts, is to guard the sovereignty of nation states, because everything we have been discussing

here is possible as long as we have our own state. If we lose it, if we become part of the blurred structure, it will overtake us. And this is very likely and is just over the horizon. At that point, our possibilities will be very, very limited.

### Béla Bauer

We talk about mutual perceptions in Europe or Central and Eastern Europe. I believe that our considerations of where manipulation and shadowing tendencies come from should not be limited to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Let me take this opportunity to share a thought: I don't like the term 'Central and Eastern Europe'. I like the term 'Intermediate Europe' because Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia belong to one cultural circle – between the Eastern and Western Christianity. And this duality encapsulates our approach and our way of thinking. I mentioned this because we are talking about manipulation, and I believe that one of the reasons we are vulnerable to manipulation is that we have no common cultural references and we always see things in terms of our own history and our own experiences. Western and Central

**We have no common cultural references and always see things in terms of our own history and our own experiences. Western and Central European press will judge everything on the basis of its own cultural references and thought patterns.**



## MICHAŁ KARNOWSKI

JOURNALIST, COLUMNIST OF THE WEEKLY MAGAZINE SIECI,  
AND WPOLITYCE.PL WEBSITE

### I am proud to participate in the debate for Poland

The image of freedom of speech in Poland as created by the major Western media is false. Everyone who appreciates truth and knows of the world just a little bit is shocked at the difference between the coverage of the Polish situation and our reality as we seem to be the most liberal country in this regard. One of the objectives of this conference at the Association of Polish Journalists is to ponder who and why cares so much about spreading misinformation about Poland. Why is everything we make ourselves, everything that is subjective, under attack? Why is there siege of our economy – EU regulations are highly unfair at times: promotion of Western companies and willingness to put a break on us are nothing short of evident. Why are our values identity being attacked? Why should we be ‘disgusting’ in culture, in the narrative of what was and what is? 10 years ago Germans did a horrible film completely distorting history – *Our Mothers, Our Fathers* – and they were not ashamed. And today we have *Green Border*, funded by Germany to a certain extent, which depicts a natural and obvious defence of the Polish state as something terrible.

At the conference we can see that the idea that the description of the current situation is unfair or that the older countries of Europe look at us with superiority is shared. This is why contact with the reader is so important. Many people appreciate what we do, they buy our newspapers and read our websites – this is the best review to us. It is often the case that readers co-funded our media. This means that we are needed and that we have the capacity to influence the situation in Poland, and perhaps in Europe. And we do it. Honest, pro-Polish journalists – as I call them – do not have it easy. In addition, there is not as much money here as in the powerful commercial media. Nevertheless, I have a sense of huge satisfaction: participating in the public arena is a huge privilege. I derive pride from the fact that I can participate in this debate about Poland and Polish affairs. Our *Sieci* journalists share my sentiments. We have had a positive effect on the course of events multiple times. We stopped a lot of bad things. Sometimes we won, sometimes we lost these battles for Poland, for the truth. But we keep on fighting. Recent years and the last decade have shown that it is worth doing it despite the huge political dispute, despite the terrible words cast against the so-called ‘regime in Poland’.

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Béla Bauer, a representative  
of the Századvég think tank

European press will judge everything on the basis of its own cultural references and thought patterns. I think that the assessment of the Trianon [On 4 June 1920, the peace treaty was signed at the Grand Trianon palace in Versailles between Hungary and the Entente states: United States, Great Britain, France, Italy, Japan, Romania, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Czechoslovakia and Poland. As a result, a large part of Hungary was divided between neighbouring countries and Hungary lost a significant part of its population. The US and Poland did not ratify this treaty; editor's note] is a certain historical caesura, meaning something completely different in Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia and Poland. Our approach to national minorities, such as those living in Hungary, is completely different to the Western, liberal thinking.

What could be the reason for this? Firstly, the fact that Hungary and the countries of Intermediate Europe from the 16th, 17th centuries onwards received a lot of ethnically different population groups, including religious groups. All of this shapes the way we relate to our minorities and how we assimilate all the knowledge that these peoples, these minorities brought with them. Please excuse such a broad approach to the subject, but I think it is important if we are talking about an urban or rural approach, concerning rural areas. The urban approach uses everything that is given, and the rural approach creates its own values. I think this is crucial. We can see this in scientific research.

Our think tank Századvég conducts various types of research. And it is worth mentioning here that we have been noticing such trends: pre-pandemic and post-pandemic. The functions of the virtual space have changed a lot. We are also able to explain much more in the change of our approach to everyday life, the simplifications we use. The method we use is that of text analysis, we try to look for meaning and significance. Remarkably enough, one concept can be used in many different ways. It is therefore easy to get attached to particular concepts.

We talked about the Western European way of understanding. Are we then able to convey ideas based on our cultural contexts, as they occur here in Poland, Slovakia, Czechia,

Hungary? Because someone in Western Europe who does not share these cultural references is unable to understand them or sometimes deliberately manipulates them. However, I have one comment on what we say about Germany. It should be taken into account that Germany is divided into eastern and western parts. East Germans are much more able to appreciate these different shades

**How not to give up? How do we make future generations aware of how the dictatorship worked here in Central Europe? How can we pass this on to our children, our grandchildren? It is very difficult.**

and glows, that is: East Germany approaches us a little differently. I think it is with greater sensitivity. Probably at the moment we have far fewer cultural references that were present under Communism. Naturally, this comes with the passage of time.

We are talking about trends that are emerging in the European Union and that are being shaped in particular by the French and the Germans. A Hungarian living anywhere in the world will always have a conservative mindset; he or she tries to think in national, Hungarian terms. And the question is: how not to give up? How do we make future generations aware of how the dictatorship worked here in Central Europe? How can we pass this on to our children, our grandchildren? It is very difficult. Of course, those who were still born in those days are well aware of all these notions, all these trends in Western Europe, this one-way

thinking. It was already passed on by King St Stephen to his son that one-way thinking was prevalent. And this is exactly what we can see now in Europe. I am referring to how thinkers approach everything that happens around them.

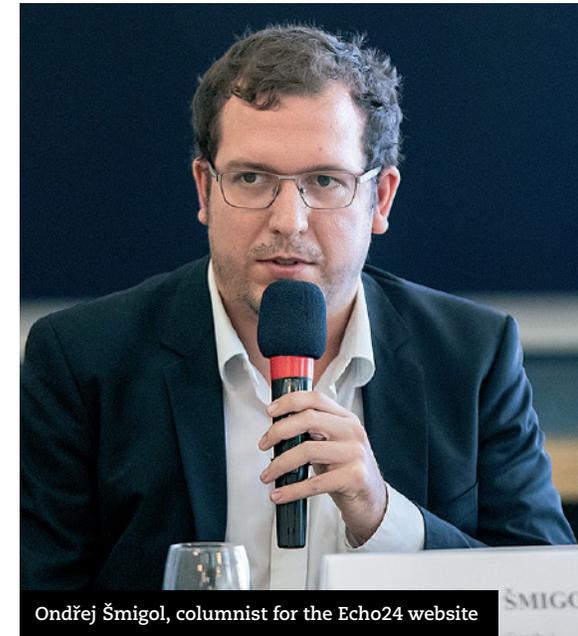
At this point, I would like to refer to a study that took place in 2018 and focused on the memories of the communist period among the dif-

ferent generations. It appears that over time some images have simplified. There was one thing we could agree on: that there is no unified picture. Interestingly, the older generation – our grandparents and parents – were not able to convey the experiences of, for example, the occupation to their children. Similarly, now the 50- to 60-year-olds are not able to convincingly convey stories of their own lives. Recently a student asked me if it was actually necessary to stop at the border and if there was a border control. I confirmed, of course. We need to pass on our experiences to the youth, so that they know, so that they understand this experience of ours and the reason why we have our distinct way of thinking. These are the sort of cultural transfers that must interact and interact bidirectionally, both from the perspective of the youth and from that of the elders.

## Ondřej Šmigol

The Czech Republic is in a slightly different situation to Hungary and Poland. Western media sometimes write about how beautiful Prague is, about cheap beer, but not much else. Fall of the Petr Nečas government, we had a social democratic government, then the Andrej Babiš government, which was ideology-free in order to draw European subsidies. Now we have a government led by the conservative Petr Fiala of the ODS [Civic Democratic Party; ed.], with a broad coalition of four other parties, and the ODS being its most conservative wing. The other parties are more liberal, with the exception of 'the populars' (KDU-ČSL), who are conservative when it comes to social issues. Therefore, for the past ten years, we have had governments in Czechia that have not pushed any major conservative ideas, which means that the Western, liberal media see Czechia as a country that is not worth writing about.

The second reason for the lack of Western interest is the Czech government's approach to the European Union. All surveys show that Czechia is very Eurosceptic towards the EU, but Czech governments are traditionally not considered problematic in Brussels: the



Ondřej Šmigol, columnist for the Echo24 website

**For the past ten years, we have had governments in Czechia that have not pushed any major conservative ideas, which means that the Western, liberal media see Czechia as a country that is not worth writing about.**

Social Democrats were never anti-European, neither was Babiš because he needed subsidies, and neither is the current government. The current broad coalition is composed of parties considered to be Eurosceptic. However, the ODS coalition partners would not dare to propose their ideas. It was the MEPs who helped promote the Euro 7 electric cars and replace the traditional ones in Czechia. The Czech establishment and diplomats are convinced that the existing coalition is beneficial and that more can be changed

in Europe if we engage in EU projects rather than cause problems. If we cooperate, we will be more rewarded or appreciated. But it's quite the opposite. When we are polite, we are of no interest to anyone. Perhaps we should speak up more often, be more careful not to be labelled in a certain way as well.

It seems to me that the image of the Czech Republic in Europe is not negative, but not too positive either. Now, for example, with the war in Ukraine, together with Poland we sent the largest amount of military aid to Ukraine and took in a lot of refugees. I haven't seen any mention of this support anywhere in Western media – whether about Poland or about us. We – Poland, Czechia – write about taking in refugees from Ukraine, but we are always mentioned at the end. These are the views of the Western European media. Czechia is basically of no interest to anyone in Western Europe.

### Jolanta Hajdasz

Perhaps in Western Europe there is no interest in Czechia, but in Poland your country is certainly of great importance to us. I would like to open the discussion.

### Paweł Lisicki

I must refer to the speech of our colleague from Hungary, because it is important in our discussion, between us representing different countries. An example of the need to be mindful of various historical sensitivities. I lived and grew up in Żoliborz, a district in Warsaw. During the communist era, the main square in Żoliborz was called Plac Komuny Paryskiej (Paris Commune Square), but before World War II, this square was named after Wilson, the US president who drafted the 1918 plan for the self-determination of nations and, as was commonly believed in Poland, was one of the main promoters of the restoration of Poland's independence in 1918. When the communist period came along, most Varsovians continued to

use the name 'Wilson Square'. It was a form of social resistance to the communist system. When the communist era ended, the name 'Wilson Square' was restored. When I went to visit Hungary and started talking and reading books on Hungarian history, I suddenly realised that this Wilson, who for us was an obvious positive hero, was considered an extremely negative hero in Hungary. After all,

**When I went to visit Hungary and started talking and reading books on Hungarian history, I suddenly realised that this Wilson, who for us was an obvious positive hero, was considered an extremely negative hero in Hungary.**



### PAWEŁ LISICKI

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF THE WEEKLY MAGAZINE DO RZECZY

## The EU is on the road to collapse

The thing about every ideology is that it is a set of certain opinions that are treated as acceptable and that it shapes the way of political thinking. Four features characteristic of today's way of thinking in the European Union – be it immigrationism, climatism, genderism or globalism – each of these issues is treated by the current leadership class – one could take the liberty to describe it so – as a form not subject to discussion. It is in this sense, of course, not in the literal sense, that we can talk about some kind of dogmatism. That is about a belief that, for instance, gender ideology is not something that is empirically researched and debated, but rather something that is to be accepted. This is a classic sign of ideology. And in this sense, various political ideologies have a component of dogmatism in them, that is they are treated as something good by default and not subject to any discussion. This often leads humanity astray and ends in a disaster. When a person loses common sense and the capacity of good judgement and gives in to an ideology, they are most often, unfortunately, subject to manipulation. They are used for evil and inappropriate purposes.

As for what could be expected from the European Union, I think that the basic thing that should be demanded is the defence of the national identity and sovereignty of individual states within the European Union. This is absolutely crucial. The sovereignty element or the attempt to stop the federalisation process in the Union is, in my opinion, the only framework that serves the European Union itself. This is so as further striving, such as we have now, to impose one's top-down solutions on others, to eliminate the right of veto, to pursue policies against individual states, does not in any way lead to closer cooperation between individual states, but will ultimately result in the destruction of the European Union. This is the path that Mr Schulz, Mr Macron and Mrs von der Leyen, and so on, have taken. This, in my opinion, is the path that will lead to the collapse of the European Union. Anyone who wants to protect themselves against this must abandon the operational plan for the federalisation of the Union. But I don't quite believe that the European elites will give it up. Therefore, I believe that this process will continue and that the collapse will ensue perhaps in the foreseeable future.

**The basic thing that should be demanded is the defence of the national identity and sovereignty of individual states within the European Union.**



this was the president who, according to Hungarians, supported the Treaty of Trianon, and the principle of the self-determination of peoples, thanks to which Poland regained its independence, was used against Hungary. That is, despite the huge numbers of minorities, many millions of them, outside the ethnic borders of Hungary, this principle was not applied to the country and the state was partitioned. The reason I say this is to show how we need to be attentive and learn about the individual countries and their traditions, to understand that we do not all have the same heroes and the same past, so that we do not then impose our own way of looking at others around us.

### Hubert Bekrycht

I have had the pleasure of representing the Association of Polish Journalists (SDP) for several years at various foreign conventions, such as those of the European or International Federation of Journalists (IFJ). And I am simply horrified. The gentlemen said that Poland has been perceived most negatively over the past eight years. In these organizations, Poland is not perceived at all, and if it is, it's only from the perspective of sixty people from the Society of Journalists. I visited The Hague recently. When I mentioned that a man from Poland proposing all resolutions condemning Poland



was a communist member of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), a Greek, a Portuguese, and a German wanted me out of the room. They said that there were communists in their countries, that they were very cool and that we should rather feel sorry for them because they were in the minority. Those people who were there, including those at the IFJ convention in Izmir the year before, completely misunderstand our perspective. I no longer have the strength to explain our point. How come the Society of Journalists affiliated with **Gazeta Wyborcza**, with TVN, with only 60 people, has one or two seats at the congresses of European delegations, and we, although more than 2,800

journalists belong to SDP, have three or four? But this is how the mandates are distributed by European journalist organisations, which are heavily subsidised with our contributions.

### Elżbieta Królikowska-Avis

I would like to refer to the words of one of my predecessors who spoke about the cultural background and tried to answer the question: why has the left-liberal media gone so far left? Why do we have so many enemies in Europe? Well, the counter-cultural revolution, that political correctness has been part of, was very gentle at the beginning, in the 1970s, 1980s, but over the last 20 years it has turned into hard



Elżbieta Królikowska-Avis, feature writer, correspondent for the Polish media from the United Kingdom

left-liberal propaganda. In the 1970s, when I was first in Spain, *El País* was a centrist daily; the German *Die Welt* was also centrist. In the late 1970s and 1980s in the UK there was *The Independent*, there was the centrist *The Observer*, only later to be bought by *The Guardian* and change its political profile. Over the past 20–30 years we can observe, as part of a cultural revolution, a change of direction in many of Europe's most influential newspapers. Not to mention how far to the left the BBC or the privately owned ITV in the UK have moved. This is one thing.

The second thing: the global film establishment has also drifted very much to the left. As a film critic in the early 1990s, I really enjoyed practising

**From Hollywood to the European Film Academy, which awards its own prize, and the BBC, the film industry has turned to the left. Agnieszka Holland's film is just a splinter of what happened. She is an absolutely typical representative of contemporary cinema.**

my profession. Being in the UK, I used to describe British and other cinema, as I often attended international festivals. Back then, there were still different film genres, e.g. costume film, social drama, psychological drama and so on. This is not the case at the moment. Nowadays, from Hollywood to the European Film Academy, which awards its own prize, and the BBC, the film industry has turned to the

left. Agnieszka Holland's film is just a splinter of what happened. She is an absolutely typical representative of contemporary cinema. Hollywood is either making virtual nonsense for children and adolescents, or films that are so politically correct that they are really hard to watch.



Jolanta Hajdasz, Director of CMWP SDP, Vice-President of SDP

### Krzysztof Skowroński

I have a question for our guests from abroad, from Hungary and Czechia. I've been to Budapest and Prague, but I've never had the opportunity to ask what is the stereotype of a Czech in Hungary and what is the stereotype you have of a Hungarian in Czechia?

### Ondřej Šmigol

I've never thought about it. It's not mentioned in niche media either. I think there is such a stereotype in the Czech media, on TV and radio: Orbán is a dictator and Hungary is a country with no freedom of speech, no freedom of the press and all the elections that have taken place there are suspicious. The average Hungarian likes palinka, goes to the sauna or bathes in hot springs and feels good.

### Béla Bauer

As for thermal springs, I don't know if I can agree with that, but in terms of a positive attitude towards alcohol, it is something natural in Central Europe. We Hungarians associate Czechs with beer. Of course, it all depends on whether the citizen in question has been to Prague or not. And as far as the media is concerned, as my colleague mentioned before me, there is little coverage of Czechia in Hungary. If the Czech Republic appears in the press at all, it is in the context of whether or not they agree with us on European issues. Then the liberal press would write about it. Or also when Czechs, for example, attack the Orbán government. However, let us keep in mind that these stereotypes did not emerge in the present day, but a long time ago. Especially in Hungary, people in their sixties don't say 'Czechia' at all, but 'Czechoslovakia' or 'Slovakia' in general. They get confused. This is something we can also call a stereotype. ■



Hubert Bekrycht, PAP journalist, Secretary General of the SDP



# Between lies and absurdity

## Fake news about Central Europe

MODERATOR: DR JOLANTA HAJDASZ

### SPEAKERS:

**DOMINIKA ĆOŚIĆ**  
journalist, publicist,  
TVP correspondent in Brussels

**RAFAŁ ZIEMKIEWICZ**  
writer, Do Rzeczy columnist

**JAN BOGATKO**  
Polish media correspondent  
in Germany

**GORAN ANDRIJANIĆ**  
journalist, columnist for the weekly  
magazine Senci (Croatia)

**JAN HROUDNY**  
analyst of the Pravý břeh (Right Bank)  
website (Brno, Czechia)

**BORIS KÁLNOKY**  
director of the MCC Institute  
– Mathias Corvinus Collegium  
(Hungary)

### Rafał Ziemkiewicz

It is a matter of fact that Western European and Western media in general are inundated with untold stories about Poland and other Eastern European countries. I would like to share a view on the origins of this phenomenon. In my opinion, what happened here was that two trends converged and understood each other perfectly. I don't know about other countries, but as far as Poland is concerned, according to my understanding 99% or maybe 100% of fake news about Poland was produced internally. These are not the ideas of Western journalists or Western media. These are the kind of situations like the one when the notorious fraudster Bart Staszewski made a sign 'LGBT free zone', suggesting that it was some kind of a no go zone for homosexuals. He later attached this sign to the names of towns and cities where resolutions had been passed that really have nothing directly to do with LGBT, for example prohibiting educators of any kind from entering schools unless they are approved by the parents of the children who study there. These images resonated in the European Parliament and formed the basis of a resolution against Poland, which allegedly created some no go

zones for LGBT people. And this still resonates today in Western media. There are dozens of such stories, and most or even all of them are made up here. Where does it come from? In my opinion, alongside the trends discussed in the previous panel, the underlying reason is the peculiar mentality of Western elites, which has not changed since the 19th century. The mentality is hard to change in general. I'm not complaining about that. Poles have also changed little since the Four-Year Sejm and the Targowica Confederation. Anyhow, Western countries are still trapped in a colonial mentality, feeling entitled to some kind of a white man's mission. They see us as underdeveloped, uncivilised people whom they will civilise. That in itself

**When a savage whom you want to civilise is being stubborn, he should simply be flogged. This is an old colonial tradition and we are just constantly being subjected to this kind of flogging so that we adopt Western values.**

would not necessarily be a bad thing. It could take the form of a benign patriarchalism towards countries that are perceived by the West not as hostile, but rather silly. Unfortunately, when a savage whom you want to civilise is being stubborn, he should simply be flogged. This is an old colonial tradition and we are just constantly being subjected to this kind of flogging so that we adopt Western values. The problem is not that Western countries still have a white colonialist mentality, but that they think the whole world is just like

them, only underdeveloped in comparison. That is, they systematically fail to see that we are different, that the countries of this region have a different history. That they had no colonies, for example, they had no slavery at home. They had serfdom, but it's not the same thing. I don't want to speak for others, but when it comes to the specifics of Polish history and the resulting characteristics of Polish mentality, I feel competent to lecture on this.

**After World War II in Germany, all those persecuted by the Nazi regime were rehabilitated, except for those persecuted under Article 175, i.e. for homosexuality. They want to cure us of their disease, which we never suffered from!**

For a German, for a Frenchman, for an Englishman, we are such an Englishman, a Frenchman from 50 or 100 years ago, who has not yet discovered certain things and makes old mistakes. Consequently, they are convinced that they know the solution to all of our problems better than we do, because these are their problems from 50 or 100 years ago. And they will solve these problems for us, whether we want them to or not, because they know better. One example: that extremely fashionable among Western media issue of homosexuality. This has actually never been a problem in Poland because we are a Catholic country, not a Protestant one. With Protestants, there is collective responsibility. Someone who sins brings misfortune upon the whole collective. Therefore,

strong pressure must be exerted on them not to sin. In Poland, the Catholic attitude is that there is no sin that could not be confessed. I will therefore go to the parish priest. As much as I've messed up, I'm going to pay for a new tin roof for the church, but I'll sort it out with him somehow. Never in our country has sin, such as homosexuality, been a public issue. No reason to be proud, but also no reason to be ashamed. It's simply nobody's business. And that is why

there was no Eulenburg affair in Poland, no Oscar Wilde. There has never been an issue of conviction for homosexuality. In the first penal code of independent Poland, homosexuality did not exist as a crime. This is why Karol Szymanowski, whose private inclinations were known to everyone in Warsaw and were laughed at by everyone, was the rector of the State Music Conservatory in the very Catholic Poland in the 1930s. Because it was his private business. He was an outstanding musician and owed everything to his talent. Meanwhile, Germany had already hounded its national hero to death in the 1950s – I'm thinking of Alan Turing. After World War II in Germany, all those persecuted by the Nazi regime were rehabilitated, except for those persecuted under Article 175, i.e. for



homosexuality. They want to cure us of their disease, which we never suffered from!

There is a second condition: Polish otherness. We don't have enough time to do a big lecture on the subject, but the Polish otherness consists in that here the class struggle has never worked. There was simply no bourgeoisie. The old Poland consisted of peasants and noblemen, and between them there was an intermediary, the Jew. The bourgeois layer never developed. It's an entirely different social structure. For various reasons, there were no peasant revolts. There were no revolutions. Consequently, the Left never had any ground to stand on here.

Poland's Left was always developed by the intelligentsia, various idealists – mostly students – and was not quite that left-wing. That is to say, just like in the case of Piłsudski, Polish leftism did not stem from Marx, but from the tradition of Tadeusz Kościuszko, the head of the first Polish uprising,

who handed out scythes to the peasants, not even symbolically. Bartosz Głowacki was rewarded for his heroism. Hence, it was a Left that accentuated social justice, but did not refer to the notion of class struggle at all. And the real, left-wing Left was marginal in Poland. And what could this margin achieve? There is a famous sentence that the philosopher Tadeusz Kroński wrote in a letter to Czesław Miłosz, in the heyday of the craziest Stalinism, explaining to Miłosz that he had done wrong by staying in the West: 'We will use these Soviet buttstocks to knock backwardness out of Poles' heads and teach them to think rationally.' Kroński was later ashamed of these words, but he reflected the mindset of the Polish Left: this nation is hopeless, it is impossible to make a revolution with it, so we need to get some buttstocks, some rifles from the outside. Today, the role of those rifles is fulfilled by the EU directives and the hope for external pressure, European sanctions. This is why the Polish left-liberal opposition is a total denunciatory opposition. Their main job is to produce all sorts of fake news and deliver it to the European Parliament, to Western newspapers and mobilise these institutions to support them in their fight against Polish populism, Polish backwardness, Polish ignorance. And, obviously, against this nationalist-Catholic government that the Poles continually elect for themselves. Even though they shouldn't, but apparently they are so ignorant and under-civilised that they don't know better.

This is actually where the two inclinations converge. In Poland, during the many years of partition, the custom of settling scores with denunciations unfortunately became very widespread. When two serfs had a dispute, one would slander the other before the treasurer, the other would therefore be flogged by the treasurer and the accuser would be satisfied that he managed to settle the matter. Unfortunately, as a result, in Poland even people with really big names and professorial titles feel completely entitled to tell on. They have no mental discomfort behaving in such a disgraceful manner.

### Dominika Ćosić

A sense of superiority, of false superiority, is present among some of our elites, the so-called opposition elites, but so it is in the West. And it's funny that these people think they are superior, when in fact they are much more primitive, vulgar and boorish. But they were told – in the case of Poland – that they were young, educated, from big cities and that gave them the right to be morally superior and to stigmatise the right-wing primitives, and they believed it. Even though these 'primitives' are often professors, eminent artists with established careers. And this resonates also, in part, with

**They were told – in the case of Poland – that they were young, educated, big city citizens, and that gave them the right to be morally superior and to stigmatise the right-wing primitives, and they believed it.**

the Western pseudo-elites, because it very much fits the image they already had of a backward Poland.

It used to be a common joke that Russia was a country where you could meet white bears on the street. Now I have the impression that – in the case of Poland and Hungary in particular – these white bears are various issues related to the so-called rule of law, democracy. They are highly exaggerated, even fake news is produced. A few years ago, an eminent British historian, Roger Moorhouse, asked me where did the bad image of Poland, of the Polish government in the West, come from. It was after 2015, after the change of government.

I wondered, I didn't want to give a simple answer along the lines of: because they don't like us, because it's not mainstream. And I came to one conclusion. Maybe it has a touch of a conspiracy theory, a bit of reckoning with the past, but let's look at who was leaving for the West during the communist era: the children and grandchildren of communists.

They left, hating Poland deeply, being disgusted by Poland. They went on to have great careers. They graduated from Western universities which people from unencumbered families did not have the chance to graduate from. They left for the West and settled there. The generation of their children and grandchildren



### DOMINIKA ĆOSIĆ

JOURNALIST, PUBLICIST,  
TVP CORRESPONDENT IN BRUSSELS

## The 'black people' of mainstream

In the previous European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission at the time, wasn't convinced to meddle with Polish affairs. In 2016, it was Timmermans who started to prompt him, using some of the Poles working at the European Commission, that the lack of rule of law and democracy in Poland needs to be addressed. Juncker then said, on a closed Advent meeting – and I know this from three different sources, 'Who am I teach Poland how to do democracy?'. This was his first reaction. Other than that he didn't know to what extent these were true reports and to what extent they were based on falsified accounts aiming to smear Poland. However, he let himself be convinced after some time. The entire mainstream stepped up as well. It announced that Poland is the 'black people'. Unfortunately, the initial activity taken by some of our politicians didn't help, including a quite inappropriate and arrogant letter where instead of giving an explanation and providing the Polish point of view, representatives of the European Union were attacked in a very infantile manner. As a result, even those who hadn't been angry and resisting at first, felt hurt. Because if you offend someone, it'll be rather uncanny for them to be full of positive emotions.

Hungarians have it similar. I have Hungarian friends, journalists in various institutions. They say that their opposition, a part of the media, behave in a similar way. In the case of Hungary, there are obviously fewer so-called independent media compared to Poland as Orbán went out of his way to gain control over the media. I discussed the matter with my Bulgarian friend and we came to the conclusion that the fact that there is such an attitude in our countries, as opposed to the West, may to a high degree stem from experiencing the communist yoke. Poles, Hungarians and Bulgarians didn't feel members of their own country as the country was enslaved, ties were weakened. It was truly a regime, so those who fought the regime and informed on it were on the right side. It amuses me when someone attempts to draw parallels between our current Polish government and the communist administration. They think that the situation is just like it was then and that they are on the right side of the force – they fight communism, which has now assumed the form of the rule of the United Right, and they think that enjoy moral superiority. This is not the case though.

**Poles, Hungarians and Bulgarians didn't feel members of their own country as the country was enslaved, ties were weakened. It was truly a regime, so those who fought the regime and informed on it were on the right side.**

has a deep-rooted sense of contempt for Polishness, for what is associated, God forbid, with patriotism, with faith, with religiosity, with this coarse Polishness. And they are the ones setting the tone. Very often working in the media. In *Politico*, the *European Newsweek*, there are quite a few examples of people who already have Western names because they are from mixed families. And it is them plus the Polish contributors from e.g. *Gazeta Wyborcza* who spit on Poland with the great-

***They eagerly play up to the Western Europeans, saying: ‘Ah, these terrible Pollacks!’ And little do they know that in the eyes of that German, Belgian, Dutchman, or Frenchman, they themselves are ‘those Pollacks’.***

est commitment. I can see for myself from my acquaintances who work for the EU institutions that they consider themselves – as is now fashionable – to be EU citizens, Europeans, and not Poles, because a true European has no nationality other than European, the EU nationality. They eagerly play up to the Western Europeans, saying: ‘Ah, these terrible Pollacks!’ And little do they know that in the eyes of that German, Belgian, Dutchman, or Frenchman, they themselves are ‘those Pollacks’. Moreover, these people deeply despise them, just as one despises snitches.

A few years ago there was an off-the-record meeting in Brussels, a lunch for correspondents, heads of think tanks and foreign journalists with Prime Minister Morawiecki. There was also a Polish woman working for a foreign media outlet. A day later, a fellow organiser told me that

a very embarrassing situation had taken place the previous day. Well, this lady was leaving with a German professor, the head of a very prestigious think tank, who told her that he hadn’t known that she was also Polish, because he associated her more with the medium in which she works. He had not thought about the surname, but associated the name more. To this she replied: ‘Unfortunately yes.’ The German asked: ‘Why unfortunately?’, and she said: ‘Because

it’s embarrassing to admit that you are from this country.’ The German was very surprised, even disgusted. My colleague told me that it was inappropriate for him to interfere as he was showing visitors around, but that he had probably never been so embarrassed in his life.

**A**nd it just so happened that a day or two later I was doing an interview with this German professor. When I asked him for an appointment, he readily agreed. But when I came in for the interview two days later, it apparently had come to him that I was working for the regime TV and I was a government party propagandist, as our opposition proclaims, and I was part of the ‘Ignorant Mass’ in general. The gentleman was polite, but looked at me with considerable detachment. He probably expected me to attack him straight away and that it would not be an interview, but



Dominika Ćosić, journalist, publicist, TVP correspondent in Brussels

an accusation. Meanwhile, I did a substantive interview on the economic affairs of the European Union. After the interview, we started talking, already off-camera, about other topics. We talked like that for half an hour, the operator had already left. Then he asked: ‘But this government of yours is terrible, isn’t it?’ ‘Why do you think that?’ ‘And Poland has no sense of solidarity at all.’ ‘In what respect?’ I asked. ‘For example with refugees. Poland does not want to participate in the relocation of refugees.’ (We talked before 2022. Maybe it was 2019, maybe 2020). I replied: ‘But do you know that there are almost a million Ukrainians living in Poland?’ because back then, after 2014, we already had a million Ukrainians in Poland, not all of whom were economic migrants. Some came from Crimea or the Donbass in eastern Ukraine. They were war refugees. I started explaining the situation to

him – that the Polish state covers the costs of refugees. He was very surprised and asked: ‘But why haven’t I read about it anywhere?’

Well, that is the question which perhaps should rather be addressed to my foreign colleagues than to me. The important thing is that he was completely clueless about it and was very surprised.

**I** say: ‘So now imagine a million people and we are yet to receive thousands more from countries that are culturally distant from us. And for that matter, how would the budget withstand that?’ The result was that we raised further issues, including those related to the rights of sexual minorities. We engaged in a long conversation, probably an hour long. At the end he said: ‘Listen, I’m going to write down your mobile number and it would be a great pleasure to meet you for coffee.’

And he has called me every now and then since then. We met for coffee. So maybe this will be a ridiculous conclusion, but after some time we brought up the subject of this colleague who very much wanted to gain in his eyes precisely by renouncing 'that awful country,' because it is 'that country,' not Poland, but 'that country;' they are from 'that country.' He asked: 'Do you know this girl?' I replied that I did. 'She said it was embarrassing to come from Poland. Actually, I didn't know how to react, because I don't know any German who would say that they are ashamed to admit that they are German, that they are from Germany. I thought she was a very nice girl, but I was so embarrassed that I didn't know how to answer her.' That's the attitude full of inhibitions. And I had really thought she was an educated person, devoid of inhibitions and adapted in Brussels.

There are plenty of such cases. I don't want to put labels here that someone is from a smaller town, from a modest family – that's absolutely not the point. One simply should be proud of one's roots, of a humble but honest family. Meanwhile, I know quite a few people who, after coming to Brussels and getting a job in the EU institutions, have become so overwhelmed with their promotion, with the fact that they work for the EU institutions, and they think that they won the lottery, that in fact from that moment nationality, especially Polish nationality, has

become a terrible burden for them. And it is mostly them who work on the documents targeting Poland. They are the first to report on what is happening in Poland, to try to escalate the bashing.

### Goran Andrijačić

I have the privilege of being able to operate in both the Polish and Croatian markets and I describe myself as a Polish-Croatian journalist. I can say that I am well aware of the situation in Croatia and the whole of the former Yugoslavia when it comes to the media market. I also know the current situation in Poland. When I first came to Poland and started working here, a few months after I moved here, the results of a study by the organisation Reporters Without Borders were published, where Poland dropped 20–30 places in the press freedom index. At that moment I could do nothing but laugh. But it was a bitter laugh, through tears, when I saw these results. Poland was ranked worse than Bosnia and Herzegovina. And it is so absurd that I find it difficult to explain. I am a Croatian who was born in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I know what the situation is there, how the media function in Bosnia and Herzegovina. There is virtually no free media in Bosnia and Herzegovina, one that would not be influenced by a political party. The situation is disastrous and comparing the media market there with the Polish one is ridiculous, absurd.



### GORAN ANDRIJANIĆ

JOURNALIST, COLUMNIST FOR THE WEEKLY MAGAZINE SIECI (CROATIA)

## We know too little about each other

I agree with Michał Karnowski, who said that there is a media strategy in place which involves prohibition to write well about Poland. The strategy also covers the Polish–Croatian relations.

What can we do to improve our mutual relations? How to get to know each other? We know too little about one another. This needs to change. Croatia doesn't have even one correspondent from Poland. And Poland doesn't have its own, just like the Polish Press Agency. The Polish Television has one reporter, who comes sometimes. When I came to Poland, I offered my services to various Croatian agencies, newspapers and media, but no one was interested to listen about anything that's happening in Poland, to see anything from that perspective. But of course, they knew that I would write in a more neutral tone, not from the leftist point of view.

The problem, then, is that in Croatia it's difficult to get objective information about what's happening in Poland and vice versa. I wanted to say that for this reason it's vital that we are meeting. The conclusion from the meeting in Zagreb was that it might be that institutions don't have their own information channel, but we must meet nevertheless. We must speak about each other, share our narratives.

I'm glad that we are here, two Croats who can speak about what's happening and how it's happening. They are still individual initiatives though. I run a blog where I write in Croatian about what's happening in Poland, but I do this for the public good and my free time is limited. There should be an information channel for people to know what's happening in Poland. So far it's been a matter of individual initiative, but institutions or associations such as the Association of Polish Journalists could take up such an initiative, which will then develop.

**When I came to Poland, I offered my services to various Croatian agencies, newspapers and media, but no one was interested to listen about anything that's happening in Poland, to see anything from that perspective.**



Krzysztof Skowroński, President of SDP,  
Editor-in-Chief of the Radio Wnet

I can honestly and responsibly say that in my opinion there is not a more pluralistic media market in Central Europe, even in Western Europe, in the whole of the European Union, than there is in Poland. There

**There is not a more pluralistic media market in Central Europe, even in Western Europe, in the whole of the European Union, than there is in Poland. There is no media market that represents the whole spectrum of different political opinions in such an accurate way.**

is no media market that represents the whole spectrum of different political opinions in such an accurate way. We have both the right and the left, or from the nationalists to the conservative media, which are closer to Law and Justice (PiS). And this is a situation that I have not seen anywhere, neither in Croatia or Slovenia, nor in Serbia, let alone Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and other countries that went through a turbulent media transition.

It seems to me that we in the Central European context do not have the same experience when it comes to media transformation. Everyone has their own specific experiences, good and bad. We recent-

ly organised a meeting in Zagreb with Polish and Croatian intellectuals. Luka Tripalo was there too. I was the chairperson of one of the panels, the topic of which was: 'How much do we learn one from the other and where do we get these news from?' I arranged an interview with Mr Zybortowicz in the *Jutarnjim List* [*Morning Journal*]. It is a liberal newspaper. The first thing the journalist asked was: 'Why did you drop in the Reporters Without Borders index?' This



From left to right: Jan Hroudny, analyst of the Pravý břeh website,  
Goran Andrijačić journalist, columnist for Sieti

is the narrative that the mainstream media in Croatia adopts.

Another example. There was the grain crisis between Poland and Ukraine. I got a call from a colleague I used to work with, which was not easy for me, but I did nonetheless. Now he is a journalist who covers foreign policy. His question was: 'Why is Poland doing this? I'm sure if Tusk was in power this wouldn't be happening.' How was I to prove to him that if Donald Tusk, God forbid, had been in power when Russia attacked Ukraine, he would not have even lifted a finger and would have done whatever he was ordered to do by Berlin? He pursued the reset policy. Tusk's government was open to Russian influence in Europe. Donald Tusk's government played its part in making European energy dependent on Russia. I would have had to spend a lot of time trying to explain and prove this to him.

Let me now return to the media transformation. At the moment in Croatia – and this is very bad – we do not have a mainstream media outlet that represents the national interests of Croatia, of the Croatian state. This state of affairs has been in place since the 2000s. This is the so-called *detuđmanisation* process. I define this as the elimination of any national politics from high politics in Croatia, including the Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ), which is the party founded by Franjo Tuđman. And so we have no media representing national interests. Our media has been purged of Croatian journalists who think in Croatian. I wouldn't want to sound dramatic, but this is a media transformation. In Croatia, there is a rift between the electorate a conservative society – and the media, which are liberal or present themselves – as centre-right but are completely left-wing. In simple terms, you could say that we have

a centre-right, but this is the kind of people's party that is becoming more and more liberal. I am, for example, surprised by Tusk's actions when it comes to abortion. But I think the same will happen in the Croatian Democratic Community.

The mainstream media in Croatia is turned against the current Polish government. A colleague of mine, who is one of the most influential columnists in Croatia, wanted to write an article for a left-wing weekly in which he portrayed Poland in a good light. He wanted to write about what is happening in Poland: that Poland has economic growth, that it is becoming a regional power, that the Polish military is becoming stronger. But they said they don't want to publish texts that write well about Poland.

### Jan Hroudny

The topic 'Between truth and lies in Central Europe' is important. I will focus on the Czech perspective and provide some comments and news within the Czech context.

I agree that correspondence about the Czech Republic in foreign media is not frequent. The Czech Republic is not interesting for foreign media. Even fake news does not appear. How are we supposed to address this? It may be a good thing that there is at least fake news about Poland or Hungary in Western European media, because at least someone is talking about you, but there is still a heap of useful work to be done. This is important because we all know how the US Republican party has behaved



From left to right: Jan Hroudny, analyst of the Pravý břeh website, Boris Kálnoky, Director of MGC Institute – Mathias Corvinus Collegium



### RAFAŁ ZIEMKIEWICZ

WRITER, DO RZECZY COLUMNIST

## Informer mission of 'Europeans'

The Centre for Contemporary Art invited me to some kind of panel – I don't remember what the topic was – with participation of an English university worker. It was a woman, who told me after arriving – and her eyes were like two big squares, out of astonishment – that she was asked to the rector's office and informed by him – thank God a normal man, so rather in the spirit of curiosity – that he had been flooded with e-mails from Poland sent by some Polish professors. I even know the names, but I won't say them. The professors reported to him that his employee, his subordinate was to appear at a fascist panel in Poland with a fascist and told him to forbid it because if he didn't, they would inform on him to his minister. The professors thought that England is like Poland. And this is commonplace in our country. I myself fell victim to a countless number of such denunciations. I believe myself to hold the record.

**There is a strong conviction, arising from postcolonial complexes, a deep conviction among those elites of ours that when Poles are shown that the West condemns them, they will be put to shame and will change their behaviour.**

And as to examples about the general public, a law is being prepared with a provision – a common practice in every normal legislation – stating that punishes people who shows sexual content to minors. The opposition is already fashioning a hard snowball out of this to the effect that the government wants to prohibit sexual education. Mr Biedroń goes with it to the European Parliament. There, nobody reads, nobody asks what's going on. As they pass resolutions in packages, they pass this resolution condemning Poland for willingness to prohibit sexual education, for no-LGBT zones or what have you. There are loads of such examples. Fake news are kept being produced about Poland. The intention being: release this, throw this in, we will put Poles to shame at the least!

The reason being, there is a strong conviction, again arising from postcolonial complexes, a deep conviction among those elites of ours that when Poles are shown that the West condemns them, they will feel ashamed and will change their behaviour. It worked back in the day, I have to admit, but hasn't been working for quite some years now. Still, using Western simplifications by the Polish opposition – opposition for the time being, hopefully it stays that way – to break Poles in, to mobilise the West against Poland, is met with huge eagerness on the part of the Western leftist liberal elites to do such breaking. This is, in my opinion, the foundation for all this phenomenon.

with regard to the Central European problem, which is the war in Ukraine. I would remind you that our Prime Minister, Petr Fiala, wrote an article for an American conservative magazine in which he defended the Czech approach to this war.

There is a lot of fake news in Western European media, but there are also long-term narratives that stem from a leftist-tinged view of the world and this is an interpretation tinged with something bad. Let me give you an example. Every year around Easter, we can hear in Western media how barbaric the traditions associated with Easter are. And these traditions in our Slavic world are similar. Part of the public, let us conventionally call it 'liberal', accepts this point of view. This is the thing that is said about Poles referring to their country with resentment. This phenomenon also exists in our country. It is a kind of phobia of 'unionism'.

When it comes to the overall image of Central Europe in Western media, here the situation is more complex. How can this be solved? Central Europe has plenty of opportunities, it has something to offer in the field of tourism or in various other areas. If we take advantage of this, we have a chance to create our positive image. And then the

fake news will not have such a detrimental effect on the perception of the country and it will perhaps be easier to deal with than it is now.

### Boris Kálnoky

I represent a Hungarian institution and I am a Hungarian citizen, but my family left the country during the communist era and I grew up in the West. I was then a correspondent for *Die Welt* for 33 years. In 2012, I left the dark side of the force when I took over the management of the media institute of the Collegium Mathias Corvinus in Budapest. And overnight the attitude of my colleagues towards me changed completely. One day I was a highly respected analyst and researcher, and the next day I became an Orbán propagandist. I can therefore sympathise with you.

How has the image of Hungary been shaped in German press, in German media after the political transformation? Initially, it was very positive. After all, the Hungarians helped to tear down the Iron Curtain, they helped to bring down Communism. Socialists are very good people given that they contributed to this. Therefore, Germans approached Hungarians in this positive way.

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### BORIS KÁLNOKY

DIRECTOR OF THE MCC INSTITUTE – MATHIAS CORVINUS COLLEGIUM (HUNGARY)

## Germans take EU criticism personally

What you can read, particularly in the German press, about Hungary and Poland says more about those media and press than about Poland and Hungary. The reason for this is a different issue. It's not like Olaf Scholz calls journalists and tells them to lie about Poland, Orbán and Hungary, that is provides journalists with guidelines and they have to lie well because they get paid well. This isn't exactly how it works. I have to say that over 33 years, I have never been told how to write and with what attitude.

It is, however, objectively true that today's journalism is unoriginal, there are many mistakes and reality is being twisted. This is a practice pursued both in Poland and in Hungary and the Western media. One more thing regarding the German policy and the German media: if we have a closer look at the media market in Germany, most of the media – such as *Die Welt* or *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* – approach the current German government with very strong criticism. *Der Spiegel* supports the German government. Very bad result of the current government in public opinion polling are linked to the fact that its politics get a bad rap in the media.

In turn, if the media criticise the government, it means that they don't get any instructions from the latter. What is it all about then? About mentality, that's for sure. The German soul has said its goodbyes to national thinking. Currently the German is not proud of being German, but replacement nationalism is a thing now. They are the best Europeans! And German virtues are presented in such a way that Germans are the epitome of good Europeans. If the Polish or Hungarian press criticises the European Union, Germans and the German press react irrationally. They seem to think that this is a personal attack on them. If so, we must be the bad guys.

Another thing is that this European project, no matter whether we are talking about wider integration or federalist structure, is most likely here for the benefit of Germany. Everyone feels it. It might be that journalists, editors, media owners and the media-working part of the society all subconsciously think that this will be good for Germans. And they have a sense that it will be beneficial for them to walk in this direction, and so they support the federalist and integrative idea.

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And what are the sources of today's fake news? The most common sources are Hungarian. How did this happen? After the political transformation, these nice socialists handed over the already existing media, which had previously been tools of dictatorship, to Swiss, Austrian and German investors. That is, all the big newspapers – because they were mainly newspapers – suddenly became privately owned by foreign companies. And the media takeover was an attack on the freedom of

**All media operated under the same structure, the communist-era editorial offices were taken over. And so the German press market sourced its information on Hungary from these very newspapers. And lest there be any misunderstanding: this was not conservative content.**

the press. Where is the German publisher Axel Springer supposed to get its information on what is happening in Hungary? After all, we have media there, we own newspapers in Hungary. All media operated under the same structure, the communist-era editorial offices were taken over. And so the German press market sourced its information on Hungary from these very newspapers. And lest there be any misunderstanding: this was not conservative content.

In 2010, Viktor Orbán's Fides won the election for the second time. Consequently, many authorities, intellectuals, writers sent letters to the European Commission and to the then US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, asking for help because the dictatorship was returning to Hungary. All

these people were absolutely credible dissidents under communism, fighting the regime. And most of the journalists from the media covering Hungary had known these people for years and were in contact with them. And suddenly these former dissidents are warning that a dictatorship is returning to Hungary. Journalists immediately went to interview them. Since then, every journalist coming to Hungary has already contacted them. Their opinions made their way into German media.

One more thing: the point of view of press agencies. The job of a press agency is to report facts without ideological leanings. In the case of Germany, the primary news source is *Deutsche Welle*. And one of its journalists at the time, very critical of Orbán – I won't give his name now – wrote a book about how the spectre of fascism had emerged in Hungary. That is to say, if the media is working on the topic of Hungarian attitudes, they mainly see the reports from news agencies. And there you can read about the horrendous things that are happening in Hungary.

Another example. When the government introduced a new media law in 2010, a *Deutsche Presse-Agentur* article reported that a new media



Boris Kálnoky, Director of MCC Institute – Mathias Corvinus Collegium

body managed by the Hungarian government was being established. If, according to this authority, a medium communicates content in a biased manner, it could be fined up to €90,000. There was absolutely no such regulation in the Act. Despite the fact, for six months, every German newspaper wrote that there was censorship in Hungary because the government, having found an article biased or anti-government, could fine the newspaper and thus bleed all anti-government press titles. And this type of news appeared in the German news agency. This was due to the a certain journalist's son who was the interpreter for every German reporter coming to Hungary who did not speak Hungarian. All the journalists who contacted this interpreter

were further appointed with the representatives of the liberal-left media. These things are happening and what can we do about it?

I could give further examples. During Covid, some fake news emerged about the Hungarian parliament closing. That it stopped working. Of course, nothing of the sort ever happened. But on a live programme, a star journalist from CNN asked the Hungarian foreign minister why the Hungarian parliament was not working. He was surprised, as he had not heard that the parliament was closed. And the question: how could it happen that on a live programme, a CNN media star, in America, makes such a mistake? She has a whole staff of people to check the facts, and she made this kind of

mistake. The staff told her that the Hungarian parliament was closed, but after all, this could have been very easily verified. How could it have happened? I am convinced that this is because they wanted to believe it. Because the mood is such that whatever bad things are said about Hungary or Poland, everyone wants to believe that this is surely the case. It is very difficult to fight this. My only hope is that new press organs are emerging in Germany, e.g. the so-called partisan-conservative Cicero; similarly in Switzerland. They are becoming quite popular because this type of content is scarce in the media market. I therefore hope that media freedom will be regulated by the free market.

### Jan Bogatko

The rule of thumb in the German media is to write badly about countries like Poland as long as the governments there are not favourable to German media journalists. This is why their image of Poland or Hungary, and to a lesser extent of Czechia or Croatia, is not positive.

If I pick up the *Deutsche Zeitung*, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* or *Die Welt* etc., I see no difference in the tone of the leading articles in these newspapers. This often results from the fact that the articles are taken over

from a German news agency and only mildly altered, or sometimes not even altered at all. If a German newspaper wants to publish an article about Poland and does not have enough knowledge, it turns to its tried and tested friends in certain Polish circles,

then they write these articles and, of course, the story repeats: 'even the Poles think so'. This is a difficult thing to understand for those who are not familiar with Polish affairs.

The image created by the media is perpetuated among people who still believe in the press, but these are becoming fewer and fewer, because the German

press and media do not enjoy public support. More than half of Germans are directly concerned about disinformation. This is news from March this year. Fake news, conspiracy theories, disinformation campaigns-hybrid warfare is really happening in the media. And hence there is a lot of misinformation. 64% of Germans are concerned about the social impact of misinformation, according to a survey by the CDU-linked Konrad Adenauer Foundation.

Public media is trusted by 96% of the Green Party voters. Since a large number of journalists employed by German media choose the Greens, they obviously have their connections to this milieu. 81% of NPD voters trust the public media.

**Fake news, conspiracy theories, disinformation campaigns-hybrid warfare is really happening in the media. And hence there is a lot of misinformation.**



### JAN HROUDNY

ANALYST OF THE PRAVÝ BŘEH (RIGHT BANK) WEBSITE  
(BRNO, CZECHIA)

## We take lies at face value

There is a Novinky.cz server in the Czech Republic. This is the second most popular and read information service in our country. Last year, it published an article reporting that girls were forbidden to wear short skirts in Poland so that they do not provoke teachers and friends. The alleged rationale was that girls in Poland have to be led via a path of chastity and innocence. The article indicated that the prohibition came from governing circles, from a government regulation. Interestingly enough, there were no source references. The matter was taken on by a smaller server, owned by a conservative newspaper, and wrote that two schools in Gdańsk were alleged to introduce such regulations. The schools denied. It was fake news, a product of someone's imagination. It wasn't true, but the first information spread over the Internet more than the correction notice. Therefore, we have to strengthen the ways we transmit information about one another. Czech journalists find it difficult to cover developments in Hungary because of language differences. Maybe artificial intelligence will help. In the case of Poland, though, the difficulty isn't that big as it's easier for us to understand each other. Still, we take false information at face value.

Worse still, we, Czechs, are convinced that we understand Slovakia very well, intuitively even, as we were one country for a long time, speak similar languages, love Slovaks and like going to Slovakia on vacation. Before elections, though, it turns out that we, Czechs, fail to understand what is happening in Slovakia. By and large, we don't possess knowledge about all Slovakia.

Not to focus on a negative note, though: in the recent months, and even for a few years, the Czech perception of Poland has been changing to positive. We see Poland as a solidary economic partner. We see the development achieved by Poland and the great aid provided to Ukraine. And then those isolated cases of fake news cease to play a major role.

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In contrast, when it comes to AfD voters – it is only 16%. This is an absolute expression of the fact that the press is not believed anymore. In fact, there was once a slogan in Germany that outraged journalists and big media: ‘The press lies.’ AfD is not only a party, it is a social attitude, and it is very easy to imagine that many supporters of Alternative for Germany who do not declare themselves as voters also think likewise and also do not trust the German media, simply having a laugh at it.

**M**any Polish issues are covered by regional newspapers, for example in Saxony the *Sächsische Zeitung*. A very interesting person in the country is the prime minister of this state, Michael Kretschmer, who has already been predicted to take up the chancellorship in Berlin one day.

The negative image of Poland can be rectified by letters to the editor and there are a lot of these letters. There are also reactions in the Polish media, and maybe, however

they are not printed, not shown on TV, nor talked about on the radio, they nevertheless get through, and that makes the German equivalents not push further with very brutal and obvious lies. In a way, a softening of this image has already become notable. Meetings between journalists are very common. I myself used to host meetings between Polish and German journalists in Zgorzelec and the German city of Görlitz. This could not last because there were allegations that the people invited to these

meetings were not from the right press and therefore should not be supported. And that’s how it ended: after a few meetings where attendance was huge. It was not possible to conduct a dialogue between journalists on what was true and what was untrue at the meeting point of the two major countries of the European Union, Poland and Germany. It has had a very negative impact, in my opinion, on the German media.

Is it possible to change the false image of Poland in the media? Is it



## JAN BOGATKO

POLISH MEDIA CORRESPONDENT IN GERMANY

### German newspapers are cast in the same mould

German media are speaking tubes with very specific political grounding. It's very difficult to find truth in them. Despite this, the readership reacts differently than what the text published in a given newspaper would suggest. They leave such comments as, 'We've been to Poland, it's a very nice place, there is no filth, everyone is amiable, no one mugs anyone' etc. And these are not orchestrated effort. The German audience reacts with particular decency to fake news, so there is hope that one day the German press starts to sing a different tune.

Let's take the scandal from last year: mercury in Oder. German service RBB24 was first to report that high mercury levels had been found in water samples. It turned out that it was typical fake news aiming to make Poland look bad. The Polish opposition knew about the issue before all other media, which reported that the fish died because of the mercury in Oder. There was no mercury in the river and then everyone steered clear of the topic. So if a topic is taken up in a fake, erroneous or thoughtless way, response is in order. As a result, the next media outlet is reluctant to continue the topic out of fear it will be regarded as untrustworthy.

When a discussion was going on about whether or not Poland should stop arms deliveries to Ukraine – and that Poland would provide Ukraine with armaments but not the most advanced ones that it is given to defend its own borders – in Germany, when the news was reported by numerous newspapers and television, people started to ponder whether Poland should be punished for reluctance towards Ukrainian armament. Ms Strack-Zimmermann, for instance, said that the German anti-aircraft guns stationed in Poland must be transported to Ukraine right away.

And there we go again with politics that aims to change the government in Poland. It cannot be describe any different. Yet in Germany everything works very slowly. This is not a country like Italy, France or Poland, where if something out of ordinary occur, people go out onto the streets, there are many voices about the matter, press articles are released etc. Here, press articles are released, that's true, but the media spectrum is not as wide as in Poland, where you simply cannot compare the 'NIE' weekly with the 'DoRzeczy' service. Very niche publications – in low circulation and with narrow readership – aside, all German newspapers are cast in the same mould.

**If a topic is taken up in a fake, erroneous or thoughtless way, response is in order. As a result, the next media outlet is reluctant to continue the topic out of fear it will be regarded as untrustworthy.**

worth the effort? I really enjoy reading old newspapers. How was Poland described in German media in the 1930s, before the outbreak of World War II? These were articles full of lies, alleging that the German minor-

this. The reaction to a disinformation campaign often leads to a correction of information, to a change of tone in articles in the German press. For example, it could not really publish negative news about the Polish

**It's really worth writing and addressing controversial topics, speaking up and pointing the finger where a lie is published and dealing with that lie.**

ity was being persecuted, that Poles were lurking to attack Germany, and so on. This information was absolutely false. Today, you could write a doctoral thesis on how great of a role the media played in the societies of the time. Back then, the media was trusted. It was different from today, with competition, social networks where we can find out whether or not what we read in the newspaper really looks in a certain way. Back then, that possibility didn't exist. Today, when it comes to the German press and its attitude towards Poland, I sense a certain similarity to the pre-war period. It is clearly extremely important to react to

economy, because it is known that the Polish economy is developing excellently, that Poland has the lowest unemployment. It's being talked about, it's also being shown, so hopefully this kind of message is getting through to the public as well.

Germans are asking themselves: what is it like there? More and more of them come to Poland and see how Poland is developing, and then they talk about it at work, at school, among their friends and family. And that's why it's really worth writing about and addressing controversial topics, speaking up and pointing the finger where a lie is published and dealing with that lie. ■





# From diagnosis to action

How to change the false image of Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary and Croatia in the media?

MODERATOR: DR JOLANTA HAJDASZ

## SPEAKERS:

### ELŻBIETA KRÓLIKOWSKA-AVIS

feature writer, correspondent for the Polish media from the United Kingdom

### KRZYSZTOF MARIA ZAŁUSKI

journalist for the Dziennik Bałtycki daily, author of the 'DACHL, czyli Niemieckie Co Nieco' podcast, media and politics observer in Germany

### OLIVIER BAULT

journalist, Observatoire du Journalisme correspondent, editor at sovereignty.pl (France)

### SŁAWOMIR WRÓBEL

journalist, correspondent for the Polish media from the United Kingdom

### LUKA TRIPALO

feature writer and journalist for the Glas Koncila weekly (Croatia)

## Elżbieta Królikowska-Avis

What to do to change the undeservedly awful image of Poland in the world? My journalist experience is quite extensive. I spent 26 years in London, I was a correspondent for the Polish media – television, radio stations, weeklies, monthlies etc. Moreover, I worked as an expert in British affairs and advisor at the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I was also the head of the English-version

eight translators, was sent into the world, to around 150 editorial offices. Was it effective? Let me show you this on the basis of a certain 'adventure' with fake news. This apropos our previous panel. Press agencies are full of fake news. Vanessa Gera, editor from the American Associated Press broadcasting station, informed various editorial offices worldwide about 60,000 fascists marching on the streets of Warsaw. The march took place on 11 November, and she in-

*Vanessa Gera, editor from the American Associated Press broadcasting station, informed various editorial offices worldwide about 60,000 fascists marching on the streets of Warsaw. The march took place on 11 November, and she informed the world about it already on the 10th.*

website of the Ministry, which was utter novelty at the time. Over two years, the website became one of the best English-version websites in Poland. What was it about? I did a press review every day and from all press I picked all of the Polish-related information that was to be sent into the world. But before the website was created, I had already reached to the most important and most opinion-forming radio stations and editorial offices worldwide. From China Today, through CNN, BBC, Washington Post, France-Press, Associated Press etc. I addressed my emails to heads directly because if anyone else got them, they would put them in trash – this is how editorial offices work. China, India, Brazil etc. – information about Poland, picked by me personally every few days and translated by

formed the world about it already on the 10th. (For all our foreign guests: 11 November is the anniversary of restoration of Poland's sovereignty. It is one of the most important public holidays in the entire year.) I read it and realised that the times didn't add up. It turned out that Associated Press lies. I sent my article about it, which – translated – went into the world. The Ethics Department Head at Associated Press wrote a letter to me asking for a meeting with the Minister to talk about the issue. Together with Mr Waszczykowski, among other people, we replied that our Minister is busy; we decided that there was no sense having a meeting with someone who would come with an already formulated assumption. Instead of making a scene on editor Vanessa Gera or dismissing her – as hers was

a grave journalist offence – he wanted to talk to save the image of Associated Press. This is how editorial offices of *El Pais*, *Die Welt*, *Le Monde* etc. operate as well. They often copy information from agencies assuming it is true, while it has been prepared by lying and twisting and with an ideology attached. Now it would be very difficult for our Ethics Committee of the Association of Polish Journalists to work as virtually all of the other side, the leftist-liberal side, is tangled up in half-truths and quarter-news of various sorts.

I think that the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs needs such a website, just like the Ministry of Culture or Ministry of the Interior – a well-run website distributed around the world. I distributed it to everyone, including over a hundred Polish embassies, so that they have first-hand information.

It's very easy to be a Deputy Minister, make appearances in the Polish media and tell Poles that we have very bad relations with Brussels, which has wronged us yet again. All the while it's about inventing ways to prevent it from happening again. Prevention is better than cure. This is all there is to it: after all, it's the

**I am invited to the British embassy on a regular basis. The place is attended basically by leftist journalists and politicians and no one else; there's hardly anyone from us. This is an opportunity to make friends, exchange business cards. It is an information exchange as well; this is where we can plant our knowledge of Poland.**

ambassadors who should defend our good name, say, 'No, it's not like that, but like that and that' and demand authentic information.

**L**et me tell another story. I am the Deputy Head of the Polish Radio Programme Council and I know that there is still a shortage of information about foreign countries. What I mean is the knowledge allowing us to use our partner, e.g. a bilateral British partner, for our purposes. We organised a full-day conference, attended by Marek Wałkuski, who came from Washington, and Maciej Jastrzębski, a very good correspondent from Kiev. I spoke about the idea of correspondents because they are an invaluable source of information. This is well played by Dominika Ćosić, who, when she wants to have news about Poland, does an interview with a big figure in Brussels or the European Union and asks such questions that the interviewee has no other choice but to take a position. I believe in the mission of good

promotion of Poland by correspondents. I did that myself in the United Kingdom.

What else came as a shock to me? I am invited to the British embassy on



From left to right: Jolanta Hajdasz, Vice-President of SDP, Director of CMWP SDP; Elżbieta Królikowska-Avis, feature writer, correspondent for the Polish media from the United Kingdom; Krzysztof Maria Załuski, journalist of *Dziennik Bałtycki*, observer of media and politics in Germany

a regular basis. The place is attended basically by leftist journalists and politicians and no one else; there's hardly anyone from us. This is an opportunity to make friends, exchange business cards. It is an information exchange as well; this is where we can plant our knowledge of Poland, in front of good food and in good company, which is of import too.

**I** have also noticed – based on the United Kingdom, Spain etc. – a change in the entire cultural landscape. The so-called political elites are a minority of citizens of a given country, but they have enormous opinion-forming capacity as they have the media at their disposal and participate in politics, which in turn drives the cinematic

establishment, and so on. The change occurred over one, maybe two generations. As a correspondent in the United Kingdom, I saw what our Solidarity Movement looked like in the British eyes. It turned out that those who left in 1968, 1977 and 1978 and in times of martial law, those who worked for the Solidarity Movement at some point, had already been that part of the Freedom Union and Democratic Union type. I am talking about Smolars – Aleksander in Paris and Eugeniusz in BBC, in the United Kingdom. They smoothly transitioned to that leftist-and-liberal part, which is the source of information for foreign correspondents and journalists in Poland or there, in the United Kingdom, France etc. That's the right trail.

## Krzysztof Maria Załuski

As a man who lived in Germany for nearly 20 years, I would like to focus on Polish–German issues. An editor from the Czech Republic once said that his country is not a hot topic for the German media, or the Western media in general. Just as nobody ever writes or speaks about Poland in Germany – with one exception: when the situation is really bad, when a breakthrough happens. From the recent weeks or months, these would be contaminated Oder, some ‘Nazi’ marches, persecution of Ms Holland, an eminent director, or a route invented by Prime Minister Morawiecki for political reasons, which is why the bor-

***When a Pole rapes or beats, nationality is given to public information. But when same actions are done by an engineer from Syria or Afghanistan – nationality and descent of the perpetrator remain unknown.***

der will need to be closed. Of course, when a Pole rapes or beats, nationality is given to public information. But when same actions are done by an engineer from Syria or Afghanistan – nationality and descent of the perpetrator remain unknown.

**F**or the Swiss – and I lived in the very borderland, 15 km away from Zurich – Poles are neighbours from space who no one knows anything about. I was once asked where I was from. I said, ‘From Poland’. He didn’t catch it and said, ‘From Holland?’. ‘No, Poland!’, ‘Where is it?’, ‘Between Germany (there was still GDR at the time) and the Soviet

Union’. He was very much surprised that there’s something between Germany and Russia at all. A 40-million nation, a trifle really.

I’m more inclined to wonder why is it us who are on the other end of these negative comments. Us, the Poles. Unfortunately, I can’t find an answer to this question as both Poland and Hungary, the Czech Republic or Croatia are countries which have nothing to be ashamed of. We are developing very well. We have great history, cuisine and tourist destinations. Yet we’ve become the favourite target of ridicule, particularly for Germans. Harald Schmidt’s jokes about Poles are popular. He is a leading comic on public television.

For some 20 years he has been telling such jokes that I don’t know whether to laugh or cry. I will quote only one: ‘Why do Russians always steal two cars in Germany? Because on their way from Germany to Russia, they have to go through Poland’. Which is to say that one will be stolen in Poland.

As you can see, these stereotypes are really unpleasant. Where do they come from? I can think of two reasons. First off, ignorance. The other one is laziness. Journalists – please don’t take offence here – are lazy. They will not gather material if they don’t have to, especially if the



## ELŻBIETA KRÓLIKOWSKA-AVIS

FEATURE WRITER, CORRESPONDENT FOR THE POLISH MEDIA FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

### How to sell the Polish image properly?

**O**nce, as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we requested the Polish National Foundation for a spot that would present famous Poles. Indeed, the spot was very colourful, dynamic and well-made – but it showed people like ballet dancers, known maybe by their families and communities. ‘Where is Paderewski and Piłsudski, where are the Polish Nobel laureates?’, I asked. They had to make the spot differently because it went to BBC News and was broadcasted globally. We have means and we have people, but they need to be willing to make an effort. And the Polish National Foundation is heavily funded by the State Treasury. Therefore, it should be manned by people who know their way around marketing and who, first and foremost, love Poland and have lived here and there in the world. It is of immense importance for us to have people who have spent some time in the political behind-the-scenes, if you like, who don’t have insecurities or fears and who know languages. There are such people.

What else could we do to sell Poland better: six years ago we had a superb Polish–British Belvedere Forum. It was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (nowadays the Polish Institute of International Affairs is the organiser) on our side and, also, by the Foreign Office on the British side. The head on our side has so far been Prof. Zdzisław Krasnodębski and on the British side – sir Malcolm Rifkind, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the times of John Major. The cooperation went great despite the fact that the previous British ambassador to Poland was, like Labour Party members, a socialist and virtually every panelist had to be argued about. I remember the fight for inviting Prof. Rev. Waldemar Cisło, to London to let him talk about how to help migrants right there. He speaks perfect English and I was delighted to witness him destroying that leftist audience. This is an example of a so-called non-governmental organisation, one of the forms with state budget participation, in this case cooperation between the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs or think tanks: the Polish Institute of International Affairs and British Chatham House. At the tier of ministers, media and non-governmental organisation we showed Poland in the heart of London. Boris Johnson and a few ministers were there; eminent scientists and journalists were present too. Chatham House is not interested in us anymore; and it’s a good thing – no more disputes and bargaining. We are now looking for a conservative think tank in the United Kingdom and we will surely find one as there are aplenty. We will continue the Polish–British Belvedere Forum as a form for presentation of Poland abroad.



**'Polish economy', 'Polish parliament', 'drunk as a Pole' – this is us they are talking about. This follows from the fact that Warsaw and Budapest pursue politics which stands in conflict with the interests of Berlin and Brussels.**

material is about an exotic country, such as Poland in German eyes. The further you go into the West, the strongest the exotic sentiments. Let me ask you: what do we know about, say, Albania aside from the fact that there was a Hoxha and the disgusting communism there? Nothing, really. What do we know about Bulgaria? There were some Bulgarians, they came with Khazars. Some stayed by the Volga, some came here and dispersed in the Slavic element.

So, ignorance and laziness. These are not the only reasons, though, particularly in recent times. I have this

impression that the most important role, towards Hungary and Poland in particular, is played by a conscious political narrative, not to call it anti-Polish and anti-Hungarian propaganda. In March this year, names of 200 German journalists – and the list has not been closed – were disclosed who accepted one and

a half million euros from the German government for 'moderation', as they called it, edited texts, trainings, lectures and other events. A largely unspecified number of journalists got paid by BND, short for Federal Intelligence Service. The names have not

been revealed out of care for the interest of the state. Why wonder then? If so much money is earmarked this way, it would be rather uncanny if journalists – we would call them regime journalists – wrote anything different than what is expected by their client, who maintains them, a.k.a. the German government. And we all know what are the German government's sentiments about Poland. It doesn't even stem from racism or stereotypes like 'Polish economy', 'Polish parliament', 'drunk as a Pole' – this is us, this. It follows from the fact that Warsaw and Budapest pursue politics which stands in conflict with the interests of Berlin and Brussels.

I will now quote data on the sources where Germans draw their knowledge about Poland from. Last

year Kantar Public polled Germans aged 18–75, that is a fully representative sample. Below are Germans' sources of knowledge about Poland:

- Television – 37%
- School – 28%
- Conversations with family – 26%
- Reports from other media (press etc.) – 25%.

Only 5% draw their picture of Poland with books. And what Polish books land in their hands? These are currently books written by such authors as Janusz Rudnicki, Olga Tokarczuk and a couple more, who – again – get paid by various foundations, make money on selling books and earn fees by touring Germany. The conditions are out of this world. One flies to Frankfurt by 16-passenger plane for instance.

And the rate for a two-week tour for a high-end writer is 20,000 euros. Heaven on earth! So if we fail to deliver such conditions under which writers, journalists and artists in

**In my opinion, we should focus on convincing Western journalists of the fact that Poland is great. How to do that? Through such activities as organising tours around Poland.**

general are paid for their work appropriately, we don't stand any chance. The journalist rate in television, radio or press in, say, Gdańsk, where I live, is around five or six thousand after taxes – and depending on the person. You cannot support a family with such money. The alternative is to go to the municipal website, where conditions are much better.

**C**oming back to the issue of improving our image abroad: in my opinion, we should first and foremost focus on convincing Western journalists of the fact that Poland is great. How to do that? Through such activities as organising tours around Poland. Let's take 20 journalists for a ride from Wieliczka to Westerplatte. Let's show them Poland at its finest, requiring in exchange only one thing: that they publish something about it. I have recently talked with Nikodem Rachoń, head of communication at the embassy in Washington. He took 20 journalists from Canada and the US to Poland, which resulted in articles that worked. All the while we do not invite any journalists. I know that Belarussians did it: they invited photographers before the war in Ukraine. I participated in

such distasteful propaganda action myself. They even showed a Viagra factory. I didn't go. I decided I would go talk to people instead. My conversations ended when a secret police

officer twisted my arm and told me to get on the bus! There is no such thing as leniency there. But there are methods: the tours around Poland and some more options, which are much more effective than buying sponsored articles in widely-read magazines, for instance. Nobody reads sponsored articles and the tours create circumstances where friends are made, bonds are forged, people start to like each other – all this has a fair chance of working.

### **Sławomir Wróbel**

**I** left for the British Isles nearly 20 years ago, right before Poland joined the European Union. For 20 years, then, I have been observing the British media's narrative about Poland and I have to say that it has changed over that time. At first, the Pole was indeed depicted following stereotypes in most media. Mostly because after 2004 British people were surprised by the number of Poles coming to the Isles. Tony Blair and his experts expected around 13 thousand Poles. Reality multiplied that estimate by 100. The gutter press had a ball of course as you



### **SŁAWOMIR WRÓBEL**

JOURNALIST, CORRESPONDENT FOR THE POLISH MEDIA FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM

## **We are perceived better and better in the British Isles**

**D**uring my 20 years' stay in the British Isles, Poland featured front pages of the local newspapers three times. The first time was in 2005, throughout the entire period from the death to funeral of John Paul II. Attention of all British newspaper covers was directed not only to the Vatican, but also – for obvious reasons – on Poland and that remarkable bereavement, which is something unthinkable in the British world. I could only compare it to the Queen's death in terms of media coverage. At the time, all newspapers in the Isles were devoted to our pope just as now they are devoted to Queen Elizabeth. Yet when it comes to the atmosphere on the streets after the death of the Queen, at the Palace of Westminster there were obviously 15-kilometre queues and everybody was silent and pensive. Just a kilometre away, carnival was in full swing. This is the difference between how Poland was affected by the death of its greatest son of nation and how Brits go about the death of their Queen, who was generally liked in the United Kingdom.

The second time Poland was featured on front pages was, unfortunately, due to the Smolensk air disaster. And I have to say, with all my conviction, that Brits behaved to us very decently. I organised a broadcast of the funeral of the Presidential Couple at Trafalgar Square, the most representative place in London. We were given permit for the broadcast at lightning speed. The funeral of Lech and Maria Kaczyński was broadcasted live on most British TV channels, including BBC. British people told us, 'We are Poles too'. I heard the statement many a time then. It was really touching. Newspaper covered broadcasts from Polish churches at the time.

The third time Poland had a very strong appearance on the British media was when Russia attacked Ukraine. Poland became the centre of the entire world's attention again. British press featured titles such as, 'Raising NATO Military Power', 'Poland Now a Country of Possibilities', 'Poland – New Regional Superpower'. Or even, 'Poland Was Right' or 'Poland – the Real Leader of Free Europe'. I have not invented these – they are all actual British headlines. It came as a shock to Brits that so many refugees are so warmly welcomed in Poland and that the Polish society has organised itself to such an extent. It did not go unnoticed.

**The funeral of Lech and Maria Kaczyński was broadcasted live on most British TV channels, including BBC. British people told us, 'We are Poles too'.**

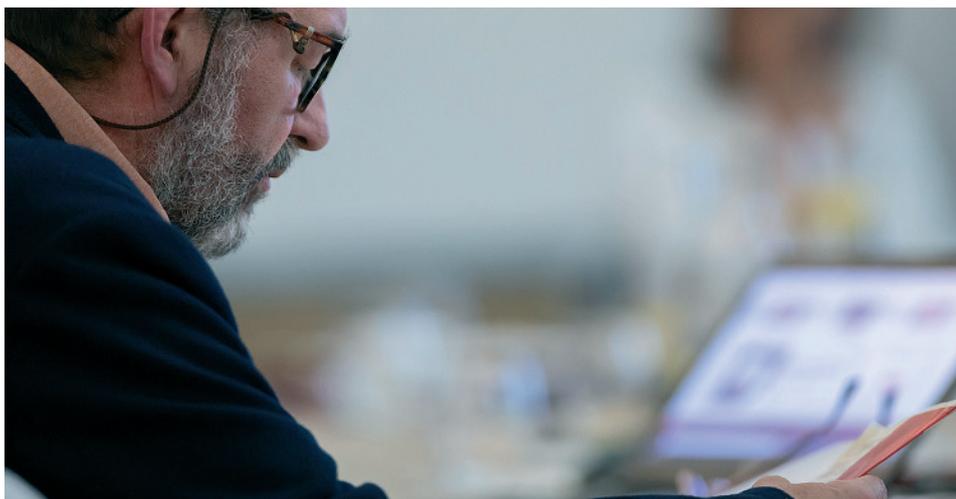
could find various cases in such masses and put them on the front pages. This is when – and here I'll allude to fake news – the myth was born that Poles eat swans; it survived quite a long time. Apparently, a Pole of Romani descent was photographed near a dead bird without feathers, most probably a swan. Surely the then popular film about Kazakh Borat wasn't

helping as we were often associated with that cultural sphere. It needs to be said, though, loud and clear, that Poles did assimilate excellently over time and the British people started to slowly accept our presence on the streets, began to take to us and in the worst-case scenario we became neutral to them.

**Ever since Brexit, the British press has featured Donald Tusk as an antagonist. He was the brake, the executor of Berlin's will, who didn't enjoy much positive fame in the United Kingdom either.**

The 2015/2016 period, say until the Brexit referendum, was when British people were getting used to the Polish presence. The vote changed the attitude of the British government towards the Poles. The decision to leave the European Union found the British looking for allies and the national decision centres went for Poland as one of them. This is also when Polish-British

forums were developed. Fortunately, the Polish government was open to such developments. It cannot go unmentioned that Donald Tusk has been the negative hero in the British press ever since Brexit. The media saw him as the brake, the executor of Berlin's will, who didn't enjoy much positive fame in the United Kingdom either.



**W**hy am I mentioning Brexit so distinctly? This is when, after the referendum, the last anti-Polish writings appeared on the walls of Polish institutions. It was coming to a halt. Of course, minor incidents may happen, but ever since that time Poland started to be perceived by the media in more positive light. The pandemic was the breakthrough. The British press, which strongly criticised the British administration for indecisiveness, pointed to Poland as an example of good and reasonable action. That attitude strengthened even more after Russia attacked Ukraine.

Here I would like to separate the good image of Poland as a country, nation and state from the fact that the image of our government presented by the British media, obviously leftist to a horrifying degree, is worse.

The Polish government is, without doubt, extreme and nationalist and wants to carry out a countersexual revolution. It goes without

saying that many negative articles were published after the Polish Constitutional Court of Law introduced changes in anti-abortion law, so were presented in negative light by the media for a while. And, as one of the previous speakers pointed out, the people who most often write about us unfavourably or report on us to the British are, unfortunately, Poles. The Western elites of the Polish community abroad often consisted partly of the children of the dignitaries of the Polish People's Republic, who left Poland years ago. They are obviously well-educated and have established contacts and, unfortunately, constant access to the media. I will give an example that is a bit sad to me as I like Katarzyna Madera, a BBC presenter, a lot in private. A very friendly person, praises Poland, received education in a Polish Saturday School, her Polish is great. That said, once she gets off the plane at the Chopin Airport, she goes straight to the pro-abortion march, an event



## KRZYSZTOF MARIA ZAŁUSKI

JOURNALIST FOR THE *DZIENNIK BAŁTYCKI* DAILY, AUTHOR OF THE 'DACHL, CZYLI NIEMIECKIE CO NIECO' PODCAST, MEDIA AND POLITICS OBSERVER IN GERMANY

### Germans know we are competition

The countries of our part of Europe are becoming ever stronger and ever more competitive. The West is, therefore, directing the discourse so that it seems that we are not that great after all. And the narrative is based on old rolls of films depicting democracy in Poland and other countries of Central Europe as a relative novelty, which could not be further from the truth. We have a much older democracy than Germans. But since we were under the Soviet's rule for over 40 years, they think we cannot be normal. We simply have to be burdened with pathology, from thieving, through laziness and to alcoholism. This conviction rears its head in a number of stereotypes. The trend has eased off for the last 20 years, but has never disappeared.

I once talked with a man who is roughly the same age as me now, that is sixty years old. His fiancée was Silesian and only because of this he deigned to talk to us, Poles. He told me, "You know, Chris, until I got to know you, I hated two nations: Poles and Jews. But now, ever since I've met you, I only hate Jews and other Poles". He had received very good education, he was very wealthy, spoke seven languages and was a boss at a large company – not the owner, but a boss of a surgical tool manufacturer. And these were his words.

He also invited me to New Year's Eve. The party was organised in a company flat above the post office in the town of Stockach. It is right at Lake Constance. Children of state officials were playing there. When midnight strikes, in all normal countries it is usually customary to open a bottle of champagne and wish everyone all the best. At the party, however, everybody stood to attention, raised their hands and sang the German anthem in the version from before 1945. Such situations happen there repeatedly. These people are not from AfD, which has garnered 32% in the eastern states, and – according to some polls – even 34% in Thuringia. The rates are around 30% in the other states. And this will be a problem for Germany. Yet they are preoccupied with us. Because this will also be a problem for Germany. And in my opinion, and I am a political scientist by education, some kind of marriage will happen there. It has already been happening at the poviats tier between CDU, which is taking quick strides to come back to power, but realising it will not form a government, it is taking in members of AfD. It might eliminate the strictly Nazi wing of AfD and it might not.

**We have a much older democracy than Germans. But since we were under the Soviet's rule for over 40 years, they think we cannot be normal. We simply have to be burdened with pathology, from thieving, through laziness and to alcoholism.**

organised by the Committee for the Defence of Democracy or a meeting with editor Piotr Kraśko. But we won't change these things.

The actions mentioned by Elżbieta Królikowska-Avis are necessary, without doubt. There should be more of them, and they should be even more telling. I have a lot of reservations to our current Polish diplomacy, which – when it comes to the British elites – relies on MP Daniel Kawczyński, the only Pole of British descent in the parliament. He introduces himself as a friend of Poland wherever he goes. However, he is quite a controversial figure for

**We won't have much to say in a lot of things as Poland. Unless something like Russian aggression on Ukraine happens, this is when truth wins – because only then it turned out that we are not a xenophobic country.**

various reasons. Most importantly, though, before the war in Ukraine he strongly urged the West to get in touch with Russia and opposed cutting ties with it. Now his statements sound straight out bizarre. He is being tried on charges of mobbing and – I suppose 'pandering' is the right term here – because he offered a senior politician a younger female colleague from the party.

We won't have much to say in a lot of things as Poland. Unless something like Russian aggression on Ukraine happens, this is when truth wins – because only then it turned out that we are not a xenophobic country.



From left to right: Krzysztof Maria Załuski, journalist of *Dziennik Bałtycki*, observer of media and politics in Germany, Sławomir Wróbel, correspondent of the Polish media from Great Britain

## Luka Tripalo

I feel good in here. I want to emphasise that as it's not customary for Croatia to be set in the Central European context. This is important not only given the current political landscape, but also because of our history. I am seated next to representatives of the countries which belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire along with Croatia. We will celebrate the 105th anniversary of its collapse in two years. Therefore, the history of our cooperation, the history of our life is not a story of young nations which are only taking their first steps in democracy.

It is also not customary to offer an introduction at the end of meetings such as today's one, but it may prove an introduction to treatment. Perhaps it should be preceded by an explanation of how we got to the diagnosis. I am a Master of Pharmacy who works in the largest Catholic weekly and the largest weekly in Croatia. So, I would like to speak a bit about how to reach the diagnosis using an example topical for Croatia and simultaneously significant for religion. Why am I speaking about diagnosis? The objective of diagnosis is to achieve health. Health is not merely absence of illness, but also physical, mental and spiritual



Luka Tripalo, publicist and journalist of the weekly *Glas Koncila*

wellbeing. The process can be mapped onto the society.

This year we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the beatification of Aloysius Stepinac, a cardinal and a Zagreb archbishop, who was sentenced in a communist trial for collaboration with the German occupant when Croatia was ruled by the fascist Germany or Italy. We also experienced a puppet government, meaning a nationalist and fascist state.

Other than being beatified, Stepinac was also exculpated in Croatia. That being said, he is an object of dispute, a discussion held not only in Croatia, but on a wider scale. The media are the biggest problem for us.

If we notice that a phenomenon affects health, the aim is not only to make a diagnosis, but also to identify possible consequences of such a diagnosis for the individual under analysis. We can go about misinformation this way and see how it affects the society, economy and values. These matters are threatened by disease.

A patient must go to the doctor's before a diagnosis can be made. The doctor takes medical history, or gathers data. The question is – does the patient feel ill? If we are looking at the case of beatified Aloysius Stepinac of Croatia – yes, the patient feels ill. A part of the society feels

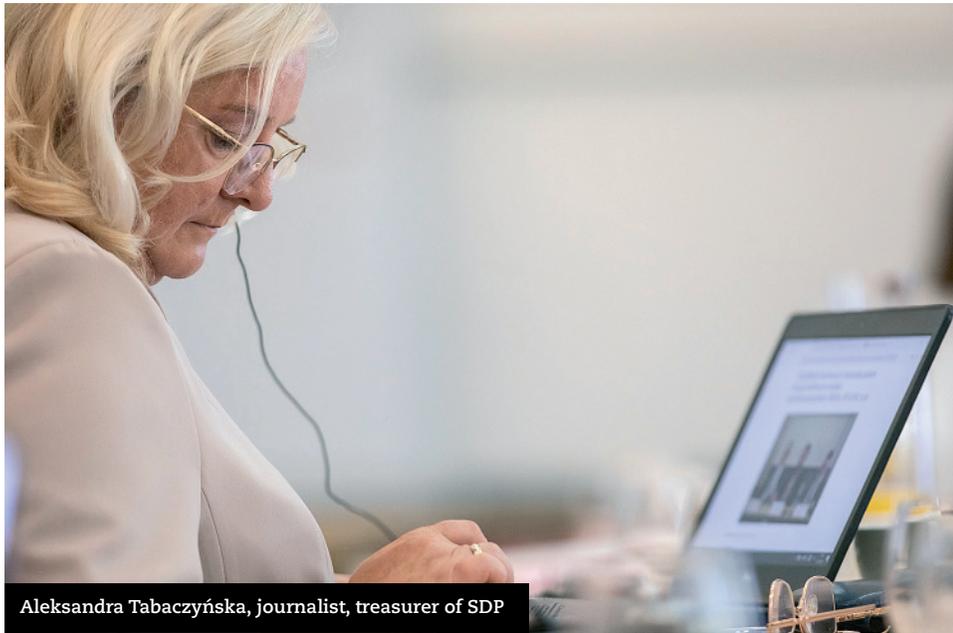
**A part of the society feels ill as it is being force-fed certain narratives. They complain when something is imposed on them, but they voice their disapproval about other things as well: conspiracy, the entire media system, bad authorities.**

ill as it is being force-fed certain narratives. They complain when something is imposed on them, but they voice their disapproval about other things as well: conspiracy, the entire media system, bad authorities.

One more thing regarding diagnosis: what steps does a patient take in their situation? When we look at our society and fake news, two interesting phenomena come to attention.

One of them is closing off. In the case of Stepinac, these are bad experiences with foreign media – German and British, to be exact – and it happens that people refuse to engage with such media. They regard them as unfit for them. They stop using them. It doesn't mean, though, that this particular media outlet stops affecting their lives.

Another reaction of a patient to their problem, or the society to fake news, is accepting a kind of stereotypes. This is a common phenomenon in the Croatian society. Someone who we see as our enemy wants to destroy one of our stereotypes. We deem our stereotype good, but somebody reacts to it poorly. This is happening in relation to Cardinal Stepinac and a similar mechanism occurred in the case of attitude to Islam. When Islam was tabloidised, it turned out that it could be our enemy.



Aleksandra Tabaczyńska, journalist, treasurer of SDP

Only when identification happens can we have a diagnosis. When we know what happened before and what gnaws at our people, we can determine the source of the problem. In the case of beatified Stepinac, we can say that

this unfavourable evaluation can never be undone. This means that the problem here is the evaluation of a person who is not only a historical figure, but also has their value. Cardinal Stepinac is one of the five most important figures in Croatia. At such

**Cardinal Stepinac is one of the five most important figures in Croatia. At such a high level, he is the only victim of the communist system who was judged unfairly and who suffered unfairly.**

the sources included falsified documents, then use of the literature created in the repressive communist system and manipulation of published data, but also more often than not moralisation, where people are made believe that they didn't do something well enough. And that

a high level, he is the only victim of the communist system who was judged unfairly and who suffered unfairly. He was fully exculpated, there are no dark, bad marks. Stepinac is also a symbol of Croatian fight for independence and statehood. As a beatified figure, he doesn't threaten our



## OLIVIER BAULT

JOURNALIST, OBSERVATOIRE DU JOURNALISME  
CORRESPONDENT, EDITOR AT SOVEREIGNTY.PL (FRANCE)

### It is worth following Hungary's example

Hungarians support independent conservative media without imposing government's line of action. Poland tends to think that in order to counteract evil, the line of action must in 100% be that of the government. But it does not work because nobody reads it or it is untrustworthy.

Hungarians support the English-speaking *rmx.news*, for instance, and now a website is being created that is to be a conservative competitor for the left-and-liberal *Politico*. They also have professional journalists, including English-speaking ones, from the United Kingdom and Germany. There is *The European Conservative* – a Hungarian monthly, issued neatly and with matter-of-fact content, and there is *Hungarian Conservative*. Support needs to be granted to creation of new, and development of already-existing, conservative media, presenting a different voice from Central Europe. The leftist voice can be there, but so should alternative information outlets.

Another example from Hungary is the activity of Mathias Corvinus Collegium – MCC, the largest private education facility in Hungary, handsomely funded by the parliament so that they have considerable resources at their disposal and not only do they educate students and provide dormitories, but they also offer courses and classes in a more conservative point of view compared to universities in Hungary in general, which are left-wing just like universities across Europe.

During the last year's elections in Hungary, when OSCE was to send observers supported by the Left in the European Parliament to discredit, Hungary invited observers from conservative organisations and entire groups of rightist journalists from many different countries worldwide via MCC to make it impossible for OSCE to provide any falsified information. They paid for their travel and accommodation, they could walk around election offices, observe, write and film – and nobody meddled. I also think that change in the rules of operation of the Visegrad Fund is in order, which Fund – as far as media-related undertakings are concerned – is manned by people with views closer to those of Soros than the Polish and Hungarian governments and imposes such requirements that no small media outlet – and such are conservative ones – stands a chance to receive additional subsidies.

We could start acting in all areas, just like Hungarians did. The extent to which they do this is surely too narrow, but Poles don't do anything at all, so they might just as well follow suit.

economic system, but he does pose a threat to the social structures as the division into the Ustashe and the guerrilla is real, a division which ossifies the conviction that this is the way to reach historical truth.

And this is where we come to the diagnosis. The consequences of what is happening need to be stated. In Croatia, piety towards a man who deserved something else is seen regarding Stepinac. On the other hand, interest is growing on the part of foreign researchers. And all this has to be set in a certain context, where Croatia is perceived through the prism of the conflict with Serbia, or the Yugoslavian community, through the prism of the Balkans. This is also happening at the church level. The church forum that dealt with our matters had 'Balkans' in its title and this is an offence of sorts for Croatia – that were were included in the Balkans and that we may warrant treatment.

When treatment is provided, this begs the question of what we can expect and what we can do if the treatment is unsuccessful. The first option is to punish the one who harms, but this is the worst method. The other option, which we use, is to officially deny, that is deliver facts. One more thing, which crystallised for me today. A topic

**We are perceived as exotic, immature and in need of help. And until we prove that such treatment is bad, the lies about Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary or other countries will persist and cause harm to our societies.**



discussed at the European tier, such as counteracting global warming, is raised to a moral significance and when someone dares think differently, they must be excluded from the community. This is how our history was manipulated; we are seen as exotic, immature and in need of help. And until we prove that such treatment is bad, the lies about Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary or other countries will persist and cause harm to our societies.

### Olivier Bault

The media-served image of Poland and Hungary has deteriorated considerably after the conservative option came to power. The words used by the Western media to describe the governments in Poland or Hungary are 'nationalist', 'ultraconservative', 'populist' and 'xenophobic'. Such governments obviously do not fully abide by the democratic rules or values of Europe, or the values of the leftist-and-liberal camp. Such governments are frequently dubbed as opposing social

and political change. This Marxist vocabulary can be found particularly in the French mainstream media, and lack of solidarity at the UE tier is emphasised. Here I mean the issue of relocation or women's rights in Hungary, for instance – apparently Hungarian women are forced to stay at home because of their families. Add the prohibition of on-demand abortion, which has already become the basic and fundamental human right in France.

In this respect Poland is also depicted as a backward country by nearly all French mainstream media.

Those who know the media market in Germany say that it's even worse there. Spain is similar, Italy features some more diversity; the United Kingdom stands out, that's for sure: this is where the tradition of freedom of the press prevailed – it is slightly limited, but pluralism is stronger. There is only one television station in France where individuals with conservative views can air their opinions: CNews, owned by entrepreneur Vincent Bolloré. The conservative point of view is more favourable for us, but this is the only station that faces threats

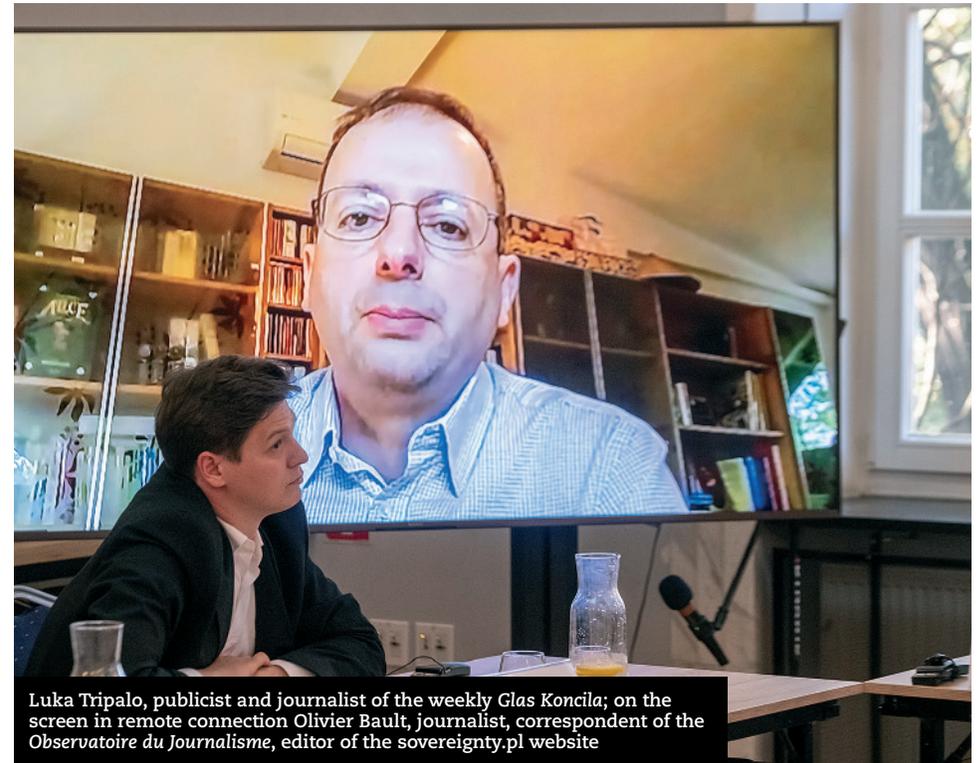
**All it takes is for a given country to have a conservative government. Slovenia found itself in such a situation briefly and what was said at the time about this country was similar to what is being said about Poland or Hungary.**

from the government, which is warning that its licence might not get extended after 2025. There was only one conservative weekly in the printed press, *Valeurs actuelles*. Its chief editor has changed now as the newspaper is owned by a Lebanese businessman who does business with the French government, so a weekly that is too critical of the government did not bode well. So this is what an unfavourable image stems from.

**A**ll it takes is for a given country to have a conservative government. Slovenia found itself in such a situation briefly and what was said at the time about this country was similar to what is being said about Poland or Hungary. When Premier Minister Morawiecki said on 21 September in Polsat News that Poland

no longer provided armaments to Ukraine, it was immediately reported that Poland would not give any arms to Ukraine over the grain dispute. Let there be no more cognitive dissonance felt by journalists in France since February 2022, when Poland, ruled by bad politicians, all of a sudden went to the so-called good camp. I heard the same not only in the French media, but also in the public Spanish radio service; same information was conveyed in RAI in Italy. My Austrian friend told me that the same show was played in Austrian television.

**W**here does it come from? One, cognitive dissonance disappears when you can clutch at something like that. Two, pursuit of scandal: I saw the same message about the arms even in conservative outlets. Three, we are talking about the lack of journalist diligence and the role of press agencies. The office of the French press agency in Warsaw comprises people with very leftist beliefs. They always present a liberal-and-leftist perspective of the Polish reality and they send those media manipulations of theirs further to the West. Sometimes the entire material in the French media is sourced from the information they get from the French press agency in Warsaw. American AP or British Reuters operate in the same way.



Luka Tripalo, publicist and journalist of the weekly *Glas Koncila*; on the screen in remote connection Olivier Bault, journalist, correspondent of the *Observatoire du Journalisme*, editor of the *sovereignty.pl* website

**T**here are examples of older fake news, for instance regarding the ruling of the Polish Constitutional Court of Court, which stated that today's interpretation of certain articles of the EU treaties makes them at odds with the Polish constitution. It's not like Poland changed its mind: the current change in the interpretation of the articles entails transfer of sovereignty, which Poles have never voted for. Yet it was presented – of course via the opposition media in Poland – that Poland signed up in the past and now it's going back on its word. The message was copied by all media in the West.

As for the well-known issue of justice reform, it was depicted as per the Polish opposition. There was no comparison to the situation in the West in the first place. Let me use a French example again. If we are talking about the politicisation of the Polish Constitutional Court of Law, no media compared it to the French Constitutional Council, which is the French counterpart of the said Court of Law and is much more political as not only are its members, appointed by the President of the French Republic or individually by the heads of both houses in the parliament, not

required to have any legal knowledge or experience whatsoever, but they can also be politicians, such as the current President of the Constitutional Council, socialist Laurent

judges, they are merely civil servants, and yet they rule as the highest instance in cases involving administrative tribunals and then move to high-end positions in ministries.

**The French and German media do not make comparisons with their situations. Why is that? They don't like the Polish and Hungarian governments. It's as simple as that. Reason? They are conservative governments, which are simply rightist and, in turn, bad.**

Fabius, who went directly from being a minister, during the times of President Holland, to sitting on the Constitutional Council. We could also point to the French counterpart of the Supreme Administrative Court of Poland: the French Council of State. Well, its members aren't even

The French and German media do not make comparisons with their situations. Why is that? They don't like the Polish and Hungarian governments. It's as simple as that. Reason? They are conservative governments, which are simply rightist and, in turn, bad.



From left to right: Jan Hroudny, analyst of the Pravý břeh website; Goran Andrijić, journalist, columnist for Sיעi; Hubert Bekrycht, PAP journalist, Secretary General of the SDP



Women's strikes is a different fake-news animal – exaggeration of the protests. Be it Hungary or Poland, during women's strikes press agencies always copied the figures provided by the organisers. And when it comes to protests of the opposition in Warsaw, attended by the President and before that the Mayor of the City as co-organisers, the figures provided by the Municipal Office were reported, but – which doesn't come as a surprise at all – the Western media communicated that these were the organisers' data but failed to say that it was the Municipal Office that was the organiser.

The question is – how does this media picture affect ordinary citizens? I was personally taken aback by the situation from 2015, when

the Hungarian border barrier, built during that great migration wave in the Balkans, was slandered so much. Such barriers had already existed in Spain or the Ceuta and Melilla enclaves, but it wasn't communicated. In the meantime, a poll done in France indicated by nearly a half of the French supported that idea of Orbán despite the fact that nearly all mainstream media reported to the contrary.

According to the polls, journalists in France are trusted by citizens the least – they come in second right after politicians – exactly because all journalists stand on one side and you can see how they resort to manipulation in the name of their ideas. But their influence is getting weaker and weaker.



## ALEKSANDRA TABACZYŃSKA

JOURNALIST, TREASURER OF SDP

### A journalist cannot fight for truth on their own

The conference let us listen to journalists who have to make a stand against ruthless manipulations directed at their homeland. Listening to the speakers, I also can't help but feel that the amount of fake news, straight out being mass media smear campaign, may be overwhelming. Nevertheless, the journalistic mission, the mission to communicate the truth, which they serve with all their heart, does not let them leave misinformation be. This is a very noble and bold attitude as a journalist who opposes lies has virtually no other option than to take up fight against them. Fight with a pen, microphone or camera. However, such a campaign should be supported institutionally and financially. A journalist fighting for a truthful message about their homeland mustn't be alone. They mustn't get exposed to attacks on them or the media where they work. Or stand before court and, when found guilty, carry the sentence on their shoulders alone, in isolation.

This is why this conference is so vital. And this why I am full of awe for doctor Jolanta Hajdasz, head of the Press Freedom Monitoring Centre of the Association of Polish Journalists, and for the Institute of Waclaw Felczak Polish-Hungarian Cooperation, conference organisers for being able to gather so many eminent journalist at one conference table. Everyone gave their own account of how big the media smear campaign against the countries of Central Europe is, what mechanisms it involves and that all those countries are victim to a well-oiled fake news industry. We also must not forget the harm done to the reader, listener, viewer or Internet user who trusts the media and fails to see manipulation for what it is. Manipulation, in turn, is always a sign of a lie. The positive conclusion here is that it isn't worth lying or supporting media-spread misinformation because the truth will sooner or later see the light of day. That said, we all want it to be 'sooner' rather than 'later'.

The conference has shown us that the image of every country to a high extent relies on the vigilance of journalists, foreign correspondents, commentators... people of the media. Fighting for Poland and every other country of Central Europe to be shown in truth in the world is a responsible task, which must not be disregarded. This is, in my opinion, the key conclusion of the *About Us Without Us* conference. *Truth and creation about Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Croatia in the media.*

## Discussion

### Hubert Bekrycht

First off, a great idea with the ranking. Secondly, I think that as people of the balanced and conservative media, we are too gentle in naming the evil that lurks in the media. Wars were once waged with others means, now they are waged with information. It's no picnic. Our world stands on the verge of information warfare. Truth be told, the warfare is already under way. Therefore, I am of opinion that we should emphasise our goals more often and more strongly and not be afraid of calling a liar from *Gazeta Wyborcza* a liar only because they are from *Gazeta Wyborcza*. And I could mention a plethora of weeklies and dailies, including European ones. The leftist media just need to know that they're not the only ones describing the reality and yes, they way they do it is unacceptable.

We also need to differentiate objectivity from diligence. I go for reliability. Objectivity is already a choice. The mainstream media frequently say, 'You are not objective because first you show Party A, then Party B'. This is my choice, but I am being diligent because I said that Party A is this and Party B is that. They don't understand it. I would rather not make 'they' and 'us' divisions as the conservative media – although I prefer the term 'balanced' – make mistakes as well.

Thirdly, have you noticed that politicians at press conferences pick questions they answer? We need to



Hubert Bekrycht, PAP journalist, Secretary General of the SDP

fight that. This cannot be allowed. 'Are you from Polish Television or Polish Press Agency?' We also need to oppose when someone from the right says, 'Those from TVN'. This is depreciation and a signal for other media, maybe those supporting a given politician. It might happen that there will be no politicians and journalists, nobody will know who is who.

Fourthly, let's do discussions because the mainstream media are afraid of discussions. Our discussion will have a constructive outcome. Discussing means showing. Even if I'm arguing with Skowroński because he is from Radio Wnet and they say there, jokingly of course, that the only thing further to the right is the wall, I want to get in there and say, 'No, it's not like that'. Or if I point out to editor Ćosić that she bashed someone too much. Discussion is interesting, disputes result in the best television scenarios and other good things.



our hand out. Let's consider how to constructively encourage people to come back to the media such as public ones.

### Goran Andrijanić

I think that we should get rid of the illusion that the leftist establishment will write about Central Europe, which defends its national interests, in positive light. I would like to see negative texts about the Croatian government in the Western media. This would mean that something started to happen in Croatia and that national politics for the good of its citizens has started to be pursued. So we need to be aware that it won't happen. We can make every possible effort and show evidence for the innocence of Cardinal Stepanic, but it will not be accepted by the leftists anyway because they killed him.

Last but not least, a change is in order in the process of supporting a balanced and conservative media trend. And it's not about the money, about us not having to keep putting



### HUBERT BEKRYCHT

PAP JOURNALIST, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE SDP

## Journalism has one goal only: to tell the truth

I've had bad experiences with the European media. I go to conventions of the European Federation of Journalists and the International Federation of Journalists (EFJ and IFJ). At the conference in Izmir a year ago it turned out that we communicate better with Turks than with the entire European federation, sponsored by the European Commission. My later European pilgrimages got only worse. I keep trying to talk and explain, but only Ukrainians, Slovaks, Czechs, Hungarians and the Baltic states understand us. Others claim that there is no freedom of speech in Poland. I ask where they know this from; I recently asked it in Hague, a few months ago. Well, the answer was that their informer – literally – is the Society of Journalists, related to the *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily and the TVN TV channel, uniting 70 members at most, while SDP has nearly 3,000 people in their ranks. I think that Europe doesn't know that there is free journalism in Poland, that it stems from pluralism, that there are private and public media, that they represent various worldviews, that it changes depending on the current government etc.

**I think that Europe doesn't know that there is free journalism in Poland, that it stems from pluralism, that there are private and public media, that they represent various worldviews, that it changes depending on the current government etc.**

The peak achievement of the Hague conference was that a Dutch journalist who works at the *Al Jazeera* channel was designated to talk about journalist independence. The channel promotes, to put it mildly, the Arabic way of thinking and in relation to Europe plays a role – and I'd like to believe it – a useful idiot of Kremlin. The lady started to talk about how great she has it in the Arabic channel, about the fact that she isn't forbidden to do anything. I asked when was the last time she did an interview about corruption in the Arabic world, in countries accused of terrorism. I never got an answer. Later a representative of said Society of Journalists spoke to say that she did the most independent and thorough documentaries about the situation at the Polish-Ukrainian border. A minute before that she said that border guards moved 100 people daily, according to her. Some of them fell somewhere, torn to pieces by wolves in forests. These are not only lies, this is slander against Poland.

The European media show Poland just like that. Maybe it's a cliché, but journalism has one goal only – to tell the truth. When one understands it, it's easier to do all, at times difficult, journalist tasks. I think that such conferences as this will let us change our image into one that's truthful.



From left to right: Elżbieta Królikowska-Avis, feature writer, correspondent for the Polish media from the United Kingdom, Krzysztof Maria Załuski, journalist of *Dziennik Bałtycki*, observer of media and politics in Germany

I like the idea with the ranking – time has come to do our thing. This is what is the most important in all this. Michał Karnowski said that such a meeting 10–15 years ago would be inconceivable: conservative journalists from Central Europe, meeting and talking. We need to go in this direction, we need to eliminate the colonial mentality. This is what is stopping us. I think that this social and economic process is already happening and leading to the liberation from this mentality. We are learning our identity, self-reliance and independence.

### Elżbieta Królikowska-Avis

I would like to elaborate on the thread on good journalism. We can't agree with the situation where guests, invited to TVN for instance, scream at one another and blow off

steam and the moderator, and host at the same time, is one of the sides to the dispute. The principles of journalism must always be the same.

It's a matter of ethics. You can't say 'you halfwit' to a politician; we mustn't allow such form of journalism. I think that Polish PR24 is quite a good example to follow. I listen to it usually from seven to nine in the morning. And I have to say that it presents a very democratic formula. At the beginning, they invite a conservative or someone from the opposition and the other 25 minutes is devoted to someone from the other side of the barricade. Then, two sides argue from eight to halt past eight and at the end – feature writers give a commentary. And there, indeed, they behave themselves, even though some journalists are quite feisty, like Dorota Kania or Stanisław Janecki. Let's follow these rules.



## JOLANTA HAJDASZ

### Let's create our own ranking media freedom in Europe Conclusions at the end of the conference

Let me share with you my thoughts as a kind of conclusion of our conference. The image of Poland, Czechia, Hungary or Croatia in Western Europe or in the Western European media is sometimes untrue, unfair or even downright false. The main thing, in my opinion, that certainly needs to be done is to advocate for an alternative to the left-wing, leftist information in the public space, to that which is just unfair or simply untrue. It is our task to ensure that all channels of information and mass communication provide such alternative in-

formation, that we create these channels and that we are able to maintain them, because, as we have heard, it is very easy to lose all subsidies if you invite the 'wrong' journalists to meetings, for instance, or raise the 'wrong' subjects.

We must ensure quality journalism, namely journalism that is based on verified facts, on reliable reporting on whatever we come across as journalists. I sometimes refer to an outright 'identity journalism', that is, journalism that many of us identify with because we have practised it all our working lives, without looking at whether we earn a lot or a little, or sometimes not at all. Because even if those salaries are cut off from us, if we lose our jobs, we will still be able to write certain books, certain articles, make films and try, even in niche media, but to speak the truth, because that is simply what our profession represents. So I am not that worried about the world being completely deprived of this truth. But the point is to make it about the here and now, while we are alive, not to discover the truth about our times only in historical terms.

I have a concrete proposal. I would like the Association of Polish Journalists (SDP) here in Warsaw to establish a European press freedom index, modelled on the one published by Reporters Without Borders, but fairer, more reliable, one that takes into account not only quantitative analyses of the media and their own assessment of the media but also uses a method which in media studies is called critical discourse analysis, and includes not only the content of what is published in the media, but also the context – the timing and all the circumstances of a given publication, what is allowed, what is not allowed, the full representation of the media system. It is not an easy task, I realise that, but it is a necessary one, and I hope that you as participants of this conference will support the idea of creating such an index. ■

I would like to see the Association of Polish Journalists (SDP) here in Warsaw establish a European press freedom index, similar to the one published by Reporters Without Borders, but fairer.

**KRZYSZTOF SKOWROŃSKI**

## We will take up the challenges

Central Europe is beginning to take a closer look at its own history and community. We start asking ourselves the most crucial questions.

Madam President Jolanta Hajdasz set a great challenge ahead of us: to create a European press freedom index. We are being judged – why shouldn't we be the ones to judge? As the SDP, we are indeed authorised to do so. I hope that such an index will be established.

We can call for fairness, hang flags in different colours, but we will not be able to change the attitude of that Western machine, which has taken decades to develop. It can only be changed by the French, Germans, Spaniards in free elections once they wake up – if they wake up. Or they will continue with the construction of their socialist homelands.

We suffered the experience of the socialist homelands and they were no good for us at all. So let's appeal, talk and invite guests to such conferences. Little by little does the trick. Perhaps their mentality will change. But then again, there are the efforts of their media to make sure it doesn't. It is a challenge, a struggle, but let's keep the faith in ourselves and not be overly concerned about the opinion of *Deutsche Welle*.

One more important point. German media coverage of Poland is negative. And what is our coverage of Germany or France? We, too, look for the negative aspects of their reality and thus create images not only of people, but of whole nations. If it were not for the mercy of God, journalists would surely be burning in hell.

John Paul II used to say: build bridges. Are we really building bridges when describing phenomena that are perhaps not marginal but may blur the bigger picture? Paris is beautiful, no matter how many demonstrations are organised there. And this must not be forgotten.

So, beyond the index, what is the task for each one of us? It is to see each other. This is the meaning of a meeting such as this. But it is not about such simple perceptions, although they are important. Our task is to observe each other's media, each other's culture and learn about each other's history. And keep building. Because after all, various things have happened between Poland and Croatia, between Warsaw and Prague and Warsaw and Budapest. Our ancestors played various instruments. And now it is essential to hear and recognise those melodies that were common for them. And that is what I wish for all of us. ■

**Madam President Jolanta Hajdasz set a great challenge ahead of us: to create a European press freedom index. We are being judged – why shouldn't we be the ones to judge? As the SDP, we are indeed authorised to do so. I hope that such an index will be established.**



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## IN DEFENCE OF JOURNALISTS

**The Press Freedom Monitoring Centre of the Association of Polish Journalists (CMWP SDP) defends the freedom of speech and independence of journalists in accordance with Art. 10 European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms:**

- we provide free legal assistance to journalists
- we are observers of civil and criminal trials in which the media and their employees participate
- when the principle of freedom of speech is violated, we take a public stand

**Write to us – we will try to help!**

*Jolanta Hajdasz*

Director of CMWP SDP



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