

Forum

01 (154) · 2025

Dziennikarzy

Crime Without Punishment



**'Liquidation' or liquidation
of public media in Poland
after 2023**



centrum
monitoringu
wolności
prasy · sdp

W OBRONIE DZIENNIKARZY

**Centrum Monitoringu Wolności Prasy
Stowarzyszenia Dziennikarzy Polskich
broni wolności słowa i niezależności
dziennikarzy zgodnie z art. 10
Europejskiej konwencji o ochronie praw
człowieka i podstawowych wolności:**

➤ **udzielamy bezpłatnej pomocy
prawnej dziennikarzom**

➤ **jesteśmy obserwatorami
procesów cywilnych i karnych,
w których uczestniczą media
i ich pracownicy**

➤ **kiedy naruszana jest zasada
wolności słowa, zajmujemy publicznie
stanowisko**

Napisz do nas, postaramy się pomóc!

Małgorzata Hajdasz

dyrektor CMWP SDP

**cmwp.sdp.pl
cmwp@sdp.pl
@cmwp_sdp**

introduction



What is the “liquidation” of public media in Poland? Or is it not rather liquidation without quotation marks, simply – destruction, destruction, demolition or demolition? The Dictionary of the Polish Language has over 50 synonyms for this very dangerous word for Polish Television, Polish Radio and the Polish Press Agency, as well as 17 regional stations of Polish Radio. It is not easy to answer this question, what is this liquidation, because this process takes place in secret, using all the principles of manipulation, so well known to those who have managed to get to know the realities of life in a communist state. In it, the authorities never directly called their actions negative for citizens. When protests and demonstrations were pacified, they only talked about “restoring order”, when the disobedient were punished with death, torture and imprisonment, it was “administering justice”. In our modern times, the illegal and forceful takeover of public media by Donald Tusk's government was called “restoring constitutional order”. The Sejm resolution listed in a few short lines all the values important to every journalist – independence, reliability, pluralism, the good of citizens and the public interest. These are words. In practice, we had a brutal disregard of media law and ethics. In practice, we had the television signal switched off and hundreds of people lost their jobs overnight. The consequences are the weakening and even annihilation of something that was an important entity on the media market. This is not in official documents, this is not in the transcripts of government or parliamentary sessions. We do not want to and cannot forget about it. That is why we at the Association of Polish Journalists have organised a special conference on this topic. And that is why today we are handing over to you a compilation of the most important statements that appeared at this conference. We are doing this in Polish and English, so that those who defend those who destroy the achievements of generations of journalists by force and illegally on the international forum can also familiarise themselves with the history of the liquidation of public media in Poland. History will judge them one day and they will stand next to criminals, careerists and usurpers. It is better to stay away from such company. ■

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

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DR JOLANTA HAJDASZ

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REDAKTOR ODPOWIEDZIALNY:

JOLANTA HAJDASZ

ZESPÓŁ:

ALEKSANDRA TABACZYŃSKA

IZABELA ŁUKASIK

ARTUR BUK

AUTOR OKŁADKI:

WOJCIECH KORCUĆ

ZDJĘCIA:

ROBERT WOŹNIAK

ADRES REDAKCJI

FORUM DZIENNIKARZY

00-366 WARSZAWA, UL. FOKSAŁ 3/5

FORUM@SDP.PL

WYDAWCA

STOWARZYSZENIE DZIENNIKARZY POLSKICH

00-366 WARSZAWA, UL. FOKSAŁ 3/5

SDP@SDP.PL, WWW.SDP.PL

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The Situation Was Very Bad. Is It Very Good Now?

COMMENT BY JOLANTA HAJDASZ, DIRECTOR OF PRESS FREEDOM MONITORING CENTRE OF POLISH JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION ON THE 2025 PRESS FREEDOM RANKING OF REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

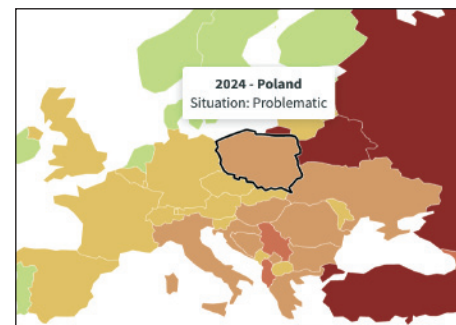
Once again, the assessment of press freedom in Poland, as outlined in the Reporters Without Borders' ranking, is completely at odds with reality. If this organisation pictures other countries similarly, it is better to discard this ranking and stop relying on it once and for all.

As it does every year, just before May 3, that is the World Press Freedom Day, which has been celebrated since 1993, Reporters Without Borders (RWB) published its "World Press Freedom Ranking". Anyone who has a clear-headed view of what is happening in the media market in Poland can probably see the grotesqueness and bizarreness of this year's ranking. It is impossible to take it seriously. Its authors have overlooked too many fundamental violations of freedom of speech in Poland, and ignored too many instances of new and positive developments strengthening media pluralism. And thus, once again, we have to ask ourselves: What is this ranking based on? Why is it so selective? Why is it so biased? It is vaguely possible for all of this to have happened by accident. And I do not suspect RWB activists of being so ignorant of the methodology of elaborating reports or similar summaries. Current presentation of Poland reads like an essay generated by an artificial

intelligence at its initial beta testing or an introduction to a paper by a student, who has absolutely no idea about the subject. Chaotic and random events discussed, assessments lacking factual support and, unfortunately, an extreme ideologisation of arguments. All in all: disqualifying quality.

What is in the 2024 Ranking?

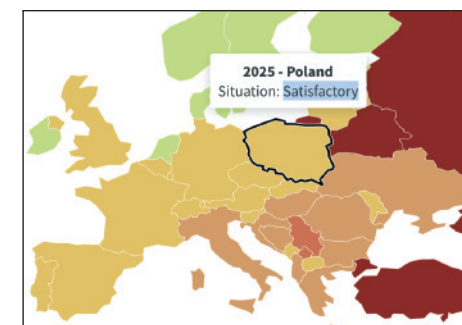
At a first glance, everything should make us happy. After all, Poland has moved up 16 places in this World Press Freedom Ranking.[1] Germany fell one position down. But even so, top 15 places, out of 180 countries in the world, are occupied by European countries. Norway, Estonia and the Netherlands are topping the ranking. Conversely, Greece, Serbia and Kosovo are the lowest ranked countries on the European continent, ranking 89th, 96th and 99th, respectively, out of 180 countries. Greece ranked the lowest of the EU countries. Slovakia and Hungary have also been criticised. Press freedom around the world is under threat – Reporters Without Borders alarm. According to the organisation, in 90 out of 180 countries, the situation of media workers is 'difficult' or 'very disturbing': *Independent journalism is a thorn in the side of autocrats* – warns Anja Osterhaus, the Managing Director of Reporters Without Borders at Deutsche Welle[2].



Additionally, many media outlets are grappling with the end of US financial aid and an increased wave of Russian propaganda – echoes Pavol Szalai, the head of the RWB EU-Balkan office at for.euronews.com[3]. Today, Donald Trump is as much a threat to the media in Europe as Vladimir Putin is – says Pavol Szalai. And I suggest you remember this statement well. It says a lot about the challenges we are facing when we read what is, demagogically, referred to as the 'world press freedom ranking'.

What do Reporters Without Borders say about Poland?

This year we have been ranked – so to speak – at 31st place. This is 16 places higher than last year, when we checked in at 47th place. On a scale of 0–100, the level of media freedom in our country was set at 74.79, compared to 69.17 a year ago. This change is explained unequivocally by the RWB: While Poland has a diverse media landscape, public awareness of press freedom remains low. During the eight years of Law and Justice (PiS) party rule, the public media had been turned into propaganda tools and privately-owned media had been subjected to various forms



of pressure. Opposition's victory at the end of 2023 has offered an opportunity to improve the right to information. Does public awareness of press freedom remain 'low'? What could be the basis for anyone to formulate such nonsense? In Poland, ordinary citizens are, in fact, HIGHLY aware of the importance of free and independent media, pluralism and the right to be informed. They express it very simply – namely: maintaining media that fight the mainstream. Every day, with their hard-earned money, millions of Poles 'vote' for their media and de facto maintain them. People have been contributing to Radio Maryja and TV Trwam, to TV Republika and wPolsce24, to Radio Wnet and Radio 357, as well as Radio Nowy Świat for many years now, and they keep running and host independent and smaller online channels. I am not claiming this is a funding that is enough for everyone. But let's make it clear – this is NOT a low awareness level of press freedom. It is just the opposite. The amount of financial contributions from private individuals in Poland shows that awareness of what press freedom is happens to be high, and even very high. After all, no one is going to spend a penny on something they do not value and do

not really need. Poles know and understand how important the media are in the modern world. Perhaps, in the end, this will reach the esteemed “without borders”.

What is the justification?

The other assessments are so bizarre that they deserve to be quoted in full. For it is difficult to summarise this intellectual gibberish. And I quote: *Private mass media are relatively diverse and include independent media entities such as television channel TVN, daily newspaper Gazeta Wyborcza and news website Onet.pl. Previous Polish government turned the public media, especially the TVP group, into propaganda tools and took control of the local newspaper network – Polska Press – through its takeover by the state-owned oil company Orlen.* I have the impression that time for the ‘Reporters’ stopped in the 1990s, or, at best, in the 2000s. Mentioning Gazeta Wyborcza, TVN and Onet as being independent media entities sounds like a joke, as I do not think any media expert would relate to this claim these days. Of course these media entities are important and that they play a unique role in the Polish media landscape, but they are so politicised, and one-sidedly involved to such an extent, that they have long since become a caricature of being ‘free’ and ‘independent’. Evidently, these media entities do not admit that they take unequivocal positions on virtually any issue, that they are no strangers to manipulation and active political engagement on behalf of just one side of the political argument, and that

those they do not approve of are battled ruthlessly and their public image is being destroyed. These were the media entities that had created the ‘contempt industry’ – a phenomenon that has been diagnosed for nearly two decades in the media space in Poland. The fact that these media are solely cited in the Press Freedom Report is a proof of how narrowly authors of this Report understand their title issue.

Also, specific to the Report is the political context. RWB writes: *Since the Donald Tusk-led coalition took control of the government in early 2024, verbal attacks and SLAPP lawsuits against private media by the government have decreased. The public media broadcaster is now the subject of a political battle between the new government, which is implementing a fragile reform, and institutions controlled by the previous ruling party, Law and Justice, which is trying to prevent it.* Has the number of SLAPP legal proceedings really decreased? Probably so, since the RWB do not see SLAPP lawsuits being brought against journalists presenting a right-wing and conservative point of view. A person sentenced to a fine of nearly PLN 70,000 for a single text about a politicised association defending the privileges of Polish communist Security Service officers (editor Sebastian Moryń). A person sentenced to a fine for criticising the politicisation of the prosecutor’s office (editor Jerzy Jachowicz). A person sentenced in a criminal trial for asking a question via email (editor Mateusz Teska). This is a handful of examples of abuses that should have been discussed in the Report in the first place, for they greatly

violate the freedom and independence of journalism in Poland. And where are the lawsuits brought against journalists by the current Prime Minister demanding up to PLN 100,000 in compensation? Where are the lawsuits brought by the ruling coalition politicians against journalists (e.g., by Mr. Giertych, Mr. Grodzki or Mr. Budka)? Why, in the Report, there is no trace of the current government restricting access to information by media presenting an opposing viewpoint to that of the government’s? Why is there not a single word about journalists not being admitted into press conferences of ministers and the Prime Minister himself – even in extreme situations, like the flood and the crisis staff meetings? Is this not a violation of the principle of freedom of speech?

What do they write about the journalist who was a Russian spy?

And there is one more extremely important question. For an exceptionally long time, as for more than two years, Reporters Without Borders have been calling for the ‘release from prison in Poland’ of Pablo González, a Russian spy acting for years ‘as a journalist and foreign correspondent’. For years, he had been portrayed as an independent journalist locked-up in a Polish prison by the right-wing authoritarian government of Law and Order. Poland has been accused internationally of violating the principle of freedom of expression and human rights violations. For more than two years, the RWB organisation

has demanded Pablo González’ release from prison, pending his trial. No earlier than December (sic!) of the previous year did Reporters Without Borders publish a statement that Pablo González – who was detained by the Polish authorities on 28 February 2022 and accused by the Polish prosecution of espionage – was indeed a Russian spy. Ultimately, it was a huge mistake on the part of Reporters Without Borders because they supported a spy and publicly criticised and damaged the reputation of the Polish state. When Donald Tusk’s government took power, Pablo González was released from prison through a prisoner swap with Russia. And everyone saw who he was. Go figure: the welcoming at the airport by Putin himself; the interviews in Russian mass media; and the revelation of some of his behind-the-scenes activities in Poland. All this should make it a priority for the organisation to consider this case in its Report as a model example of violation of the principle of freedom of expression. Meanwhile, everything that we are being served is a statement that Pablo González ‘compromised the journalist profession and exploited journalists’ rights in a democracy’. The 2024 Press Freedom Ranking itself does not spill a word about this. Here, one thing is worth adding: Reporters Without Borders continue to treat Pablo González’ partner as a ‘journalist prosecuted by Polish authorities’[4]. Maybe, finally, their colleagues in the Polish mainstream media would address them about who she really is and that they would finally stop ridiculing themselves in their defending

the persecuted. I do not intend to address them for it is already a waste of time. Anyway, RWB reporters ignore anything that does not fit their vision of 'freedom of speech'. And another excerpt from the Report devoted to Poland: *the constitution guarantees freedom of the press and the right to information; the previous government tried to limit these rights with specific legislation – for the sake of, e.g., combating the influence of Russian espionage. The current government continues to restrict media activities at the border with Belarus, where dozens of migrants died. Specifically, dozens out of hundreds who tried to enter Poland. (...) The increasing polarisation of society has led to an increase in verbal attacks on journalists. The conservatives are trying to discourage journalists from covering LGBTIQ+ or gender issues, and defamation is still punishable by imprisonment.*

That is basically it. One should, however, be pleased. One way or another, we have a fundamental change to the previous year – the RWB have improved our overall rating. A year ago it was still 'problematic', now, a year after, it is 'satisfactory'. Thus, it is better. In the description, every sentence is a manipulation or a lie, but who is going to read it anyway? The message is clear: for 8 years the situation had been terrible, Poland was falling to a gradually lower place in the Ranking. And after the change of government it is getting better, everything is improving and returning to the established norm from before 2016 (i.e., the year when Poland fell for the first time and then, until 2023, every year it got worse and worse). Now, it is fine. Just enjoy yourselves.

And now, a word of personal comment. The ranking of Reporters Without Borders is a serious brand in today's world. Founded in 1985, the organisation quickly became a global authority, especially for countries where freedom of expression could only be dreamt of. These included, obviously, communist states, such as Poland. Reporters Without Borders campaigned openly in defence of journalists and dissidents, and published courageous (that is to say, at the time, what we thought) lists of 'persecutors of press freedom', which included the names of perpetrators and inspirers of attacks on journalists and the media. More often than not, these were the names of influential people whose responsibility for violating press freedom was not always well received. In Poland, where freedom of expression, i.e. the freedom to write and publish what one thinks, is exceptionally valued. The organisation of Reporters Without Borders has become a symbol of a supra-national institution whose assessments are not questioned and the organisation itself is considered an oracle. This is the case and it is to be accepted without questioning. If someone does not like something in the organisation's assessment, it means the individual is no expert and had better not speak publicly about it. One would embarrass and discredit oneself. With this in mind, however, let me point out what is not in this Ranking – and this is the main reason why I call it bizarre and grotesque.

In the Reporters Without Borders ranking, there is not a single word about the ongoing state of liquidation of the public media over the past 14 months, nor a word about the associated state of programme and financial collapse of these media. Not a single case of violation of the principle of freedom of speech and independence of the media in relation to the private media by Donald Tusk's government in Poland has been described. And these threats are regularly diagnosed and described by the Press Freedom Monitoring Centre of Polish Journalists Association, and even by the National Broadcasting Council, the most important constitutional supervisory body of media governance in Poland.[5]

Meanwhile, in December 2023, we witnessed an unprecedented event in the history of the Polish media. The government has initiated the process of liquidating all public media companies in Poland: the national Polish television broadcaster – Telewizja Polska S.A. (TVP), the national Polish radio broadcaster – Polskie Radio S.A. (PR) and its 17 regional radio broadcast divisions, as well as Polish press agency – Polska Agencja Prasowa S.A. (PAP). The sole argument for the liquidation of the companies were the assessments on the quality of programmes expressed by the ruling

coalition's partisans. No substantive documents nor studies have been elaborated to justify the need to 'liquidate' public media, and the process of liquidating these media has been launched on the basis of a resolution of the Sejm, not an act of law, making this action completely unlawful. The process of replacing the authorities of the media companies took place in a forceful manner and was assisted by hired private security entities and the police. TVP Info (the national Polish television broadcaster's news channel) was taken off air, and news and current affairs programmes on several national Polish television channels were discontinued. Media executives and staff were dismissed and suspended with an immediate effect. There is not a single word about this in the 'Reporters Without Borders' ranking. The organisation, though, does one thing: refer to these actions as 'implementation of a fragile reform,' which they do not even describe – this short statement, apparently, is pretty much all they have to say about it. It is pathetic and nonsense, utterly unprofessional, lacking expertise and biased. It is not even possible to argue with such a document. It would probably have to be redrafted and rewritten. However, let us not fall for the presentation of its results along the lines of 'the situation was very bad, and it is very good now'. ■

[1] <https://rsf.org/en/country/poland>

[2] (<https://www.dw.com/pl/ranking-wolno%C5%9Bci-prasy-polska-w-g%C3%B3r%C4%99-niemcy-w-d%C3%B3r%C5%82/a-72415924>)

[3] (<https://pl.euronews.com/europa/2025/05/02/swiatowy-ranking-wolnosci-prasy-europa-wciaz-prowadzi-choc-sytuacja-sie-pogarsza>)

[4] <https://rsf.org/en/poland-spanish-russian-national-pablo-gonz%C3%A1lez-abused-rights-democracies-grant-journalists>

[5] <https://www.gov.pl/web/krrit/stan-kryzysowy-mediow-publicznych-w-polsce-nowa-publicacja-krrit>

CMWP SDP

PROTESTS

against not allowing a TV Republika reporter to attend crisis management team meetings with Donald Tusk

CMWP SDP strongly protests against not allowing a TV Republika reporter to attend crisis management team meetings in Wrocław during the flood threat that is taking place in southern Poland. Blocking journalists from accessing information during such a huge danger is unacceptable and is completely against the law.

Today, i.e. on September 18, 2024, editor Janusz Życzkowski, a reporter from TV Republika, appeared for the fourth time in a row at the crisis management team meeting in Wrocław and for the fourth time he was not allowed to attend the meeting of this team. Since September 16, these meetings have been open to all media, and Prime Minister Donald Tusk takes part in them. This is a scandalous violation of Polish law – including the Press Law, the Act on Access to Public Information and the principles of professionalism in media communication applicable to representatives of the authorities and state officials. CMWP SDP strongly emphasizes that in the current situation of threat to human life and health, denying information to the media is, above all, a disregard for the most important moral norms that apply in society. In a situation of threat to human life and health and the related dynamics of events, equal access for all media to information provided by members of the government and representatives of crisis teams is essential so that the largest possible number of citizens can be informed about threats and actions taken by emergency services or recommendations of crisis teams. This knowledge can help save lives and provide assistance to those at risk at the right time. It allows people to take appropriate actions to save and protect themselves, their health and property, and to help others in need. Denying access to information to one of the largest news television stations in Poland, TV Republika, is a scandalous denial of the rules of a law-abiding state based on equal principles for all and a violation of the principle of freedom of speech, which is fundamental to a democratic system.

CMWP SDP once again appeals to representatives of the authorities to ensure equal access to information for all media, especially in situations of threat. We emphasize that blocking journalists' access to information is unacceptable and illegal. CMWP SDP also appeals to journalists present at the meetings of the crisis security staff to demand equal treatment of all journalists and media in the flood threat situation that is currently taking place in our country.

Dr. Jolanta Hajdasz, Director of the SDP Press Freedom Monitoring Center

CMWP SDP Consultative Council:

Michał Karnowski

Janusz Kawecki

Paweł Lisicki

Krzysztof Skowroński

Leszek Sosnowski

Wojciech Surmacz

Warsaw, September 18, 2024



STATEMENT OF THE SDP MAIN BOARD

ON THE EFJ's REACTION

**TO THE ELECTION
OF DONALD TRUMP**

The reaction of the European Federation of Journalists to the democratic election of the US President is astonishing and difficult to accept. The organization warns against the alleged threat that Donald Trump is to media freedom, and to prove it, quotes his statements taken out of context and describes events, overinterpreting them and giving them a non-existent context, e.g. by writing that „D. Trump wanted to shoot journalists from the mass media” or called for „mass imprisonment of journalists” (ang. „he fantasized about a mass shooting of journalists”, „Donald J. Trump has called for journalists to be imprisoned and raped for not revealing their sources”). The EFJ publishes its statement: „on behalf of all journalists”, although the people speaking on our behalf are aware that in every country there are also other journalists who share the critical assessments of President Donald Trump and his associates, e.g. Elon Musk on the subject of mainstream journalism. It is a pity that on the occasion of this year's elections, the EFJ does not notice the manipulations and mistakes that are increasingly being made by traditional media, which do not hide their political sympathies and are unable – or rather do not want – to honestly present the election programs of people who have views different from their own.

The Association of Polish Journalists appeals to colleagues from the EFJ to refrain from emotional assessments and groundless criticism of the newly elected US president, especially if they do so on behalf of all journalists belonging to the EFJ. When emotions are put aside, it is easier to accept that democracy requires acceptance of voters' decisions even when the elections are won by those you do not support or understand.

on behalf of the SDP Main Board
Dr. Jolanta Hajdasz, President of the SDP

Warsaw, November 7, 2024



**Protest
of the SDP
Main Board
against the
proposals to
implement
the Digital
Services Act
(DSA) into
the Polish
legal system
by the Polish
government**

STOP CENSORSHIP

The SDP Main Board strongly protests against the announcements of restrictions on freedom of speech contained in the draft act implementing the Digital Services Act (DSA), presented by the Ministry of Digital Affairs on 13 December 2024. In the opinion of the SDP Main Board, this is an indirect way of introducing censorship on the Internet in Poland and enabling ruling politicians to interfere with content published online using the structure of state administration. This blatantly violates the principle of freedom of speech guaranteed in the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, expressed in Article 54, which unequivocally prohibits preventive censorship.

The Ministry of Digitization wants illegal content published on the Internet to be reported to the President of the Office of Electronic Communications, and under the new regulations, he is to have the authority to immediately block content on the Internet that he considers to violate „personal rights or intellectual property rights, exhaust the features of a prohibited act or praise or incite to commit such an act”. Decisions on blocking are to be executed immediately, without the consent of the court. This would be done in express mode, i.e. within 2-21 days without the knowledge and participation of the author of the entry, even at the request of an outside entity, who would only feel that a given publication „infringes their personal rights” (in the project it is called a „trusted whistleblower”). The project also assumes a significant expansion of the powers of the President of the Office of Electronic Communications, meanwhile this office has no experience in resolving disputes in the field of freedom of speech, protection of personal rights or counteracting discrimination. The President of the Office of Electronic Communications is appointed by the Sejm by a simple majority vote at the request of the Prime Minister, so the dominant political option at the time decides on this choice. This creates a convenient opportunity for politicians to use the above-mentioned powers to block, for example, critical opinions about themselves online. This violates fundamental human rights, which include the right to freedom of speech in a democratic state. The arbitrariness of the decisions of the President of the UKE is also exceptionally controversial. They can only be appealed to an administrative court, which does not deal with resolving cases concerning disputes concerning freedom of speech, but only the legality of various types of procedural matters. In the absence of the participation of the author of the content in these proceedings, this creates a huge and highly probable risk of abuse.

In the opinion of the SDP Main Board, the proposed provisions therefore violate the independence of the media and the independence of creators, including journalists. In the absence of judicial supervision and procedural guarantees, this is the introduction of a censorship mechanism into the Polish media system that is prohibited in a democratic state of law. The SDP Main Board appeals to the government to withdraw from adopting these controversial provisions and demands that they respect the constitutional rights of citizens, which include freedom of speech.

January 16, 2025

The Main Board of the SDP submitted an appeal
to President Andrzej Duda to veto the so-called

censorship act

On March 26, 2025, the Senate voted on an amendment to the Penal Code, which, under the guise of combating alleged „hate speech,” may in fact be used to suppress public debate. Several dozen philosophers, scientists, and publicists, standing in defense of the pillar of a democratic society, which is freedom of speech, signed an appeal to the President of the Republic of Poland, calling for a veto of the act. The signatories include, among others, Prof. Zdzisław Krasnodębski, Prof. Ryszard Legutko, Dr. Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, Prof. Jan Żaryn, Rafał Ziemkiewicz, Paweł Lisicki, Łukasz Warzecha, Bronisław Wildstein, the brothers Michał and Jacek Karnowscy, and Dr. Jolanta Hajdasz, president of the SDP. The Main Board of the SDP also filed a separate appeal to President Andrzej Duda to veto this act. As a result of this widespread protest action, on April 17, 2025, Andrzej Duda referred the amendment to the Penal Code to the Constitutional Tribunal in the preventive control mode. In practice, this means blocking the provisions that were supposed to protect new groups from alleged „hatred.”

Appeal of the Main Board of the SDP to the President of the Republic of Poland to veto the so-called censorship act.

On March 6, 2025, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland passed the government's draft Act amending the Penal Code, which contains provisions on the criminalization of so-called „hate speech”. On March 26, the Senate adopted these provisions without amendments, and the amended Act is now waiting for your final decision.

On March 6, 2025, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland passed the government's draft Act amending the Penal Code, which contains provisions on the criminalization of so-called „hate speech”. On March 26, the Senate adopted these provisions without amendments, and the amended act is now awaiting your final decision. In the opinion of the SDP, this is one of the most dangerous attacks on freedom of speech in the recent history of our country. Under the pretext of combating discrimination, regulations are being introduced that can be used to censor public debate in Poland, punish people for expressing their beliefs, and as a consequence, marginalize even large social groups, e.g. Catholics.

The Ministry of Justice, which prepared the proposed amendment, wrote in its justification that the change „will ensure a more complete implementation of the constitutional prohibition of discrimination on the basis of any reason, as well as the implementation of international recommendations regarding the standard of protection against hate speech and hate crimes”. Meanwhile, the adopted act, in the name of „equality” and „tolerance”, provides for the extension of the catalogue of so-called „protected characteristics”, including sexual orientation and so-called social gender. In practice, this means, for example, that anyone who talks about marriage as a union between a man and a woman may be accused of „hate speech” and punished with a penalty of up to 3 years in prison, and a parent who opposes sex education in line with gender ideology in schools may be considered a person spreading „discrimination”.

The new regulations particularly threaten the freedom of speech of those who, by virtue of their profession, speak out in public. These are primarily journalists and social activists, scientists and academic lecturers, teachers, politicians and priests, although of course this act also violates the right to freedom of speech of ordinary citizens. For journalists and media creators, this act is also particularly dangerous due to the so-called chilling effect. We observe every day that public debate on a given topic can be effectively silenced when its participants are threatened with lawsuits, imprisonment or a fine, and this will be the case here. The criminalization of so-called „hate speech” in Western countries has resulted in, among other things, limiting discussions on topics related to sexuality, marriage, family and upbringing. This leads to absurd and even absurd situations when the use of pronouns defining gender is prohibited in public spaces (e.g. at universities), when criminal charges are brought against people praying in front of abortion clinics or people who are supporters of traditional marriage and traditional family.

Therefore, on behalf of the Association of Polish Journalists, we appeal to you, Mr. President, to veto the above-described censorship act.

SDP Main Board:

Jolanta Hajdasz, SDP President; **Wanda Nadobnik**, SDP Vice President; **Mariusz Piłlis**, SDP Vice President; **Aleksandra Tabaczyńska**, SDP Treasurer; **Hubert Bekrycht**, SDP General Secretary; **Maria Giedz**, SDP Main Board Member; **Paweł Gąsiorski**, SDP Main Board Member; **Krzysztof Gurba**, SDP Main Board Member; **Michał Karnowski**, SDP Main Board Member; **Andrzej Klimczak**, SDP Main Board Member; **Anna Popek**, SDP Main Board Member; **Krzysztof Skowroński**, SDP Main Board Member; **Janusz Życzkowski**, SDP Main Board Member;

Warsaw, March 28, 2025

ATTACK

ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH

CMWP SDP IN DEFENSE OF TERRESTRIAL CONCESSION FOR TELEWIZJA REPUBLIKA AND WPOLSC24

Centrum Monitoringu Wolności Prasy SDP strongly protests against the scandalous decision of the Provincial Administrative Court, which on April 9, 2025 overturned the decision of the National Broadcasting Council to refuse a concession for the wPolsce24 channel. This decision may in practice mean the invalidation of the granting of a concession for terrestrial broadcasting of the television program for TV Republika and Telewizja wPolsce24. In June 2024, in a competition conducted by the National Broadcasting Council, the constitutional regulator of the media market, these stations received a concession to broadcast this program for a place on the MUX-8 multiplex. Now, after 8 months of market operation of both stations, the WSA is questioning the legality of the concessions of both TV Republika and wPolsce24. CMWP SDP informs that it is monitoring this case and will immediately inform all European institutions that are responsible for monitoring media pluralism and independence in the European Union about its progress. In the opinion of CMWP SDP, the decision of the Provincial Administrative Court is an attack on the freedom of speech of a democratic state. Its foundations include, among others, the authorities' adherence to the principle of freedom

of the press, respect for journalistic independence and rigorous adherence to the principle of media pluralism. Freedom of speech means that not only the freedom to express one's views is guaranteed and protected, but also the freedom to obtain and disseminate information. Media pluralism, in turn, is the ability of the media to provide recipients with different opinions and ideas, and in order to protect the functioning of structural pluralism and content pluralism, democratic states create appropriate legal regulations and have special procedures. The justice system stands guard over them. Today's decision of the Provincial Administrative Court violates these fundamental principles of the Polish media system in their entirety. The reasons for this radical decision are unclear, the oral justification of the Court contained many false and unconfirmed information, which in itself indicates questionable legal and factual grounds for making such a radical and controversial ruling.

The media market regulator is also to be punished. The Chairman of the National Broadcasting Council, in accordance with the Court's decision, is to pay over PLN 10,000 in costs of the proceedings. On the day of the announcement of the above-mentioned judgment, the Chairman of the National Broadcasting Council Maciej Świrski stated that the National Broadcasting Council will file a cassation appeal against the judgment of the Provincial Administrative Court. Maciej Świrski also emphasized that until the final conclusion of the proceedings, the licenses of Telewizja Republika and Telewizja wPolsce24 are still valid.

CMWP SDP informs that it is monitoring this case and that it will immediately inform the European institutions that are responsible for monitoring the pluralism and independence of the media in the European Union about its progress.

Warsaw, April 9, 2025



CMWP SDP files a report to the Prosecutor's Office in defense of a TV Republika reporter

On April 15, 2025, Jolanta Hajdasz, director of CMWP SDP, filed a report of the crime of beating a journalist in circumstances indicating the perpetrators' intention to suppress press criticism. It concerns the beating of journalist Janusz Życzkowski, a TV Republika reporter and a member of the SDP Main Board during an election rally for Rafał Trzaskowski in Wieluń. In the opinion of CMWP SDP, the above act was intended to prevent the injured party from asking questions to the candidate for the President of the Republic of Poland and to intimidate him in order to discourage him from acting as a journalist. In this case, such treatment of a journalist also constitutes obstruction and suppression of press criticism, i.e. a criminal act under Article 44, paragraph 1 of the Press Law. Regardless of the above, the journalist's property was destroyed (Article 288 § 1 of the Penal Code).

On April 10, 2025, during an election rally organized by the staff of the candidate for the President of the Republic of Poland, Mr. Rafał Trzaskowski, in Wieluń, editor Janusz Życzkowski – a journalist from TV Republika and a member of the Main Board of the Association of Polish Journalists, was beaten. He was pushed, hit, and his equipment – glasses and a reporter's camera – was destroyed. The injured party was taken to hospital, where the forensic doctor determined that the injuries had lasted for over 7 days and that an orthopedic collar had to be applied due to a spinal injury. The injured party still experiences severe pain and is forced to take medication.

Considering the above, a combination of crimes occurred. Article 157 § 1 of the Penal Code penalizes the use of violence resulting in damage to health lasting over 7 days. In this case, the medical documentation (the forensic doctor's ruling) raises no doubts as to the duration of the injuries. At the same time, the circumstances of the event described above indicate that the beating of the journalist also constituted in this case obstruction and suppression of press criticism, i.e. a criminal act under Article 44, Section 1 of the Press Law. Regardless of the above, the journalist's property was destroyed (Article 288, Section 1 of the Penal Code). These acts were committed with direct intent.

Article 54, Section 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland guarantees freedom of expression and the acquisition and dissemination of information. Any interference that restricts the ability of journalists to perform their information function is a violation of constitutional civil rights. The actions of the perpetrators directly affect the person of the journalist, but also the constitutional foundations of a free society, weakening the control mechanism implemented by the media. Aggression against journalists leads to the so-called chilling effect. Physical attacks, in addition to material and health damage, make journalists afraid of undertaking critical interventions, which in consequence causes self-censorship and a decrease in the quality of public debate. As a result, this state of affairs destroys social control, which is one of the basic assumptions of the functioning of a democratic state of law.

Based on art. 304 § 1 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, the Press Freedom Monitoring Center of the Association of Polish Journalists files a notification of the commission of the crime of beating a journalist and causing bodily injuries for a period exceeding 7 days, in circumstances indicating the intention of the perpetrators to suppress press criticism. With the above in mind, the SDP CMWP requests the initiation and conduct of criminal proceedings in the case, including securing the necessary evidence and identifying the perpetrators of the criminal acts.

April 15, 2025

PROTEST OF THE SDP BOARD AGAINST THE BRINGING OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING COUNCIL BEFORE THE STATE TRIBUNAL

In May 2024, a group of 185 MPs filed a motion to bring Maciej Świrski, Chairman of the National Broadcasting Council, the constitutional regulator of the media market in Poland, before the State Tribunal. This was done on the basis of unfounded allegations. The applicants accuse the head of the National Broadcasting Council of violations in three different segments: blocking approximately PLN 300 million in subscription fees for public radio and television (which was problematic after these media were put into liquidation), blocking licenses for private broadcasters TVN, TVN24, Radio TOK FM, Radio ZET (they operated and operate continuously and without obstacles), as well as failure to conduct statistical studies on the viewership of television stations in Poland (they are being conducted).

In July 2024, the motion was reviewed by the Sejm's Constitutional Accountability Committee. It unanimously decided that the motion required supplementation; it referred it to the Speaker of the Sejm. The case is currently practically not being processed in parliament, it is only being publicized in the media favorable to the government.

Members of the National Broadcasting Council may be brought before the State Tribunal for violating the constitution or the act in connection with the position they hold or within the scope of their office. The resolution on holding someone accountable before the State Tribunal is passed by the Sejm by an absolute majority vote in the presence of at least half (230) of the statutory number of members of parliament. The resolution of the Sejm on holding someone accountable before the State Tribunal results in the suspension of the person concerned from their duties.

PROTEST OF THE SDP GROUP

The SDP Main Board strongly protests against attempts to bring Maciej Świrski, Chairman of the National Broadcasting Council, before the State Tribunal. The charges formulated against him by MPs of the ruling coalition are insinuations based on false accusations. The proceedings conducted against him in the Sejm's Constitutional Accountability Committee are a political campaign aimed at destroying the authority and image of the Chairman. These actions are political revenge by the government on Maciej Świrski for publicly criticizing the unlawful and forceful takeover of public media in December 2023 and 2024, and for defending freedom of speech and pluralism in the media after the formation of Donald

Tusk's government through a justified, public defense of private media such as TV Republika, Telewizja wPolsce24, Radio Wnet, or TV Trwam and Radio Maryja against attacks by ruling politicians. In the opinion of the SDP Main Board, bringing Maciej Świrski before the State Tribunal is also aimed at paralyzing the work of the National Broadcasting Council, the only constitutional body supervising media order in Poland. Adopting a resolution by the Sejm to bring someone before the Supreme Court means simultaneously suspending the person concerned by the motion until the allegations are clarified. Suspending the Chairman of the National Broadcasting Council from his duties means that the decisions made by the Council will not have legally binding force. In order for them to become binding, they must be signed by the Chairman of the National Broadcasting Council each time. In accordance with the applicable regulations, the Sejm will also not be able to appoint anyone in place of Maciej Świrski until the State Tribunal takes into account the accusation brought against him, and this could take years. The SDP Main Board emphasizes that the Council adopts resolutions by a majority of 2/3 of the votes of the statutory number of members, i.e. five people. This means that each decision must be supported by four people. In the event of Maciej Świrski being suspended from the KRRiT, no resolution can be adopted without the votes of all of its remaining members, which, given the current political polarization of the Council, in practice means that it will be unable to make any decision. This is an extremely dangerous situation for the functioning of radio and television in Poland, threatening freedom of speech and economic freedom, causing far-reaching financial and programming problems for all broadcasters operating in our country.

Such actions by the ruling politicians violate the independence of the regulatory body in the media area, which is a value particularly protected by both the law of the Republic of Poland and the law of the European Union.

Therefore, the SDP Main Board appeals to the members of the Constitutional Accountability Committee and to the deputies and senators to discontinue the proceedings against Maciej Świrski.

Jolanta Hajdasz, President of the SDP; **Wanda Nadobnik**, Vice President of the SDP; **Mariusz Pilis**, Vice President of the SDP; **Aleksandra Tabaczyńska**, Treasurer of the SDP; **Hubert Bekrycht**, Secretary General of the SDP; **Paweł Gąsior**, Member of the SDP Main Board; **Maria Giedz**, Member of the SDP Main Board; **Krzysztof Gurba**, Member of the SDP Main Board; **Michał Karnowski**, Member of the SDP Main Board; **Andrzej Klimczak**, Member of the SDP Main Board; **Anna Popek**, Member of the SDP Main Board; **Krzysztof Skowroński**, Member of the SDP Main Board; **Janusz Życzkowski**, Member of the SDP Main Board

Warsaw, May 7, 2025

CRIME WITHOUT PUNISHMENT. 'LIQUIDATION' OF PUBLIC MEDIA IN POLAND IN 2023-2024

DR JOLANTA HAJDASZ

PRESIDENT OF THE POLISH ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS (SDP), DIRECTOR OF THE PRESS FREEDOM MONITORING CENTRE OF THE SDP



I would like to warmly welcome you to the conference, which we have given the telling title: Crime Without Punishment. "Liquidation" of public media in Poland 2023/2024. It is impossible to say it, so I will emphasize that the word "liquidation" is in quotation marks. This is necessary, because this liquidation is apparent, but it really does a lot of damage and destroys, almost irreversibly, public media in Poland. Public media,

which are the property of each of us, everyone who lives here, who pays taxes here, who identifies with our country, with Poland.

The conference is taking place on a symbolic day, December 19. Exactly 12 months ago, on December 19, 2023, the ruling coalition of PO, PSL, Third Ways and the Left, with its majority in the Sejm passed a resolution on the basis of which the dismantling of the



legal press system in Poland began. The media system, on the regulations of which all electronic media operate, including public media, i.e. Polish Radio, Polish Television, and the Polish Press Agency. The heads of these media, who served as presidents at that time, accepted our invitation to the discussion. The former presidents of TVP will be with us – Jacek Kurski and Michał Adamczyk, Mateusz Matyszkowicz, unfortunately he will not come, today he is in the Labor Court, in two trials of his former subordinates from television, Wojciech Surmacz, former president of the Polish Press Agency, will also be there. Representatives of journalists, dozens of people, will also speak today, who will tell what lawlessness they encountered and, in fact, how the takeover of public media took place and how it is still happening now. And the last,

third panel of today's conference will be devoted to Belsat TV. The liquidation of a very unique public television unit that has been operating continuously for 17 years, which is now being transformed in such a way that what was created with such difficulty over the years is being destroyed. We want to describe this lawlessness and we want to document what is happening today on this supposedly free and equal media market for all entities. Outstanding Polish journalists, people involved in working in public media, will talk about it. Today, most of them operate completely outside of it, building their own commercial media, independent of the government. But this story must be told in detail, because only by knowing the past can a person understand the present and prepare for what awaits them in the future. ■



Panel I

The forceful takeover
of public media, its course
and consequences

SPEAKERS:

MACIEJ ŚWIRSKI, JACEK KURSKI,
MICHAŁ ADAMCZYK, WOJCIECH SURMACZ



THE AIM IS TO DIVERT THE MONEY STREAM TO COMPETITORS

MACIEJ ŚWIRSKI
CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL
BROADCASTING COUNCIL



Thank you very much for the support from the SDP (Association of Polish Journalists), of which I am a member, but due to my position, I am unable to participate in the Association's work. This support from the community is extremely important to us, because the pressure exerted on the National Council is currently very strong and unprecedented. Of course, these are not the kind of repressions we remember from the 1980s. We are currently dealing – in a system that is 'still' nominally democratic – with elements of authoritarianism, if not outright dictatorship. This pressure primarily translates into the usurpation of the National Council's powers by the government, the National Council's powers in the media market.

The National Council is the only regulatory body authorised to intervene in the media market and in activities related to the granting or revocation of licences and to monitor how a given media outlet behaves in accordance with the law. The government has nothing to do with it. It has always been clear in the history of the Third Republic of Poland that there is a separation between the government and the media in terms of power and

control. It is true that the government had some influence on the appointment of board members, but there has never been a situation like the one we have now. In the context of today's anniversary of public media, it can be observed that lawlessness has prevailed. From a constitutional point of view, last year's parliamentary decision has no legal significance. If the root is unlawful, then the whole tree is unlawful.

At present, we have the following situation: the bodies of companies that have been illegally removed are either not functioning or have been re-established by the National Media Council. We are talking about Mr Michał Adamczyk, who has been appointed president of Telewizja Polska. We don't know what to expect from the change in the National Media Council. However, it should be noted that there are 17 local companies and Polskie Radio Duże, where the liquidators are present. From the point of view of legal sources, this is not a legal activity, which does not necessarily equate to the courts acting appropriately in this case. Some

of these liquidators have already gone through the validation procedure completely, as the first entry in the KRS was protested against by either the company authorities or the people entitled also by the National Council. As a result, some of the court cases on this issue have already ended with a supposedly

to do with liquidation. These are symptoms of this superficiality. They don't answer our questions because they don't recognise the authority of the National Broadcasting Council in this matter.

Article 10 of the Broadcasting Act states that the Chairman of the Na-

It has always been clear in the history of the Third Republic of Poland that there is a separation between the government and the media in terms of power and control

'final' entry. The remaining activity of the liquidators is still unregistered, but awaiting final registration at the second instance. That's how it looks legally. Operationally, on the other hand, in the sense of life, these de facto liquidators should lead the liquidation of the companies, as this follows from the assigned duties of the From our observation, as well as from statements made by the liquidators themselves and from what I learned during the hearings of the Constitutional Accountability Committee – I will not go into details here – we learn that a sham liquidation is being carried out. During a meeting of the National Council, to which we invited the liquidator from Poznań and Radio Dla Ciebie, I asked about this directly and it was clearly stated that no liquidation was being carried out, but the word 'apparent' was avoided in the response. The fact that media companies are buying equipment, hiring people and conducting image campaigns also points to actions that are merely superficial. Some are selling off assets, such as Radio Krakow. This has nothing

tional Council has the right to ask the media service provider about issues related to the implementation of the concession or the duty card. A duty card is something like a licence in the commercial market, but it concerns the fulfilment of a public mission in public media. It is approved by the National Council and signed by the President by negotiation. Now the situation is that throughout this year, which is just coming to an end, a duty card has been in force, which was approved in 2020. The next one should be agreed between the National Council and the companies this year. Except that the provision on the duty card conflicts with another provision on the creation of the state budget. Namely, the duty cards are issued for 5 years, while the state budget is created once a year, so it is not possible to plan 5 years of activities for the duty cards. In both 2020 and 2024, the National Broadcasting Council rejected the duty cards because there is no money to implement these plans beyond the first year. That is to say, in our case, as far as 2025 and subsequent

years up to 2029 are concerned, we don't have the money to fully implement the duty card. We have 605 million planned for the coming year, and the companies have planned to spend 3.5 billion for the coming year. And now, if we are talking about the situation of the public media one year after the unlawful coup, in contrast to previous years, when the rule of law in the media was still in force, the parliament, at each approach to the budget plans, under a special law on the compensation of subscription losses, allocated amounts for the maintenance of the public media in the form of treasury vouchers. At the very beginning, these were monetary amounts. At the moment, the current Sejm has not allocated any funds to public media. And this is precisely the lawlessness. No such item has been included in the budget.

Only the item in the planned budget of the National Council appears, i.e. the planned money from subscription fees paid by citizens, the estimated value of which, taking into account the anticipated demand, I have already provided. The companies have planned around 15 billion over five years. It is not possible to raise such a sum from subscriptions alone in such a short time. Media consumption has changed dramatically. People watch what they want to watch. What's more, you don't necessarily need a TV linked to a subscription, but can use other devices that are not subject to subscription fees. As a result, a downward trend is becoming noticeable, with an ageing population as an additional cause. The fact that parliament has not planned for the maintenance of public media in its budget is scandalous and lawless!



Jolanta Hajdasz, Maciej Świrski, Michał Adamczyk

Companies receive money – partly in the form of a deposit and partly directly. Those who receive funds from the deposit should go to court with their nomination for liquidator and an entry in the National Court Register, which is, of course, still debatable in the first instance. This entry is issued by the same court receiving the deposit from the National Council. If the court finds the entry to be correct, it should release the money. The argument is that these deposits do not exist. Nonsense. A court deposit under the Civil Code is the fulfilment of a claim. If I deposit money and there is a dispute as to who should receive it, the court will decide. However, the government denies it. In cases where they are entered in the second instance, those individuals receive the money directly.

Jolanta Hajdasz: Once again, we are dealing with a very complex legal procedure, which many of us observers will not fully understand. Is there a solution to all this mess? What's your opinion on it? Is there still any light at the end of the tunnel that this national asset – the media – will one day be saved? A good example is the viewership of public television. Polish television was a phenomenon on the European media market. It was the only one of the post-communist countries to have such a strong market position, strengthened in the last eight years of the united right government. At the moment, the drop in viewership is dramatic, and I'm not just talking about TVP Info, but all channels. You can clearly see how TVP's market position

is marginalised and unrecoverable, in my opinion. This gift to commercial television was handed to them on a plate. What's your take on that? Will there be anything to save?

Maciej Świrski: Without a doubt, the liquidation of public media is a way of repaying commercial media, especially one station, for their support during the eight years of Law and Justice rule. The aim is to divert the money stream to competitors. What was probably unexpected and triggered a powerful attack on the National Council was that Republika took over part of TVP Info's audience and began to pose a real threat to commercial media. A certain patriotic camp has formed in Poland, encompassing a very broad community for which patriotic values are valuable. They didn't appreciate it because they live in their own bubble. We all know where it comes from.

Can it be rebuilt? I doubt it. The public media is in a state of audience collapse: part of it doesn't want to watch and the other part has TVN. Perhaps regional radio stations will return to the status they once held. On the other hand, yesterday's decision to take control of commercial media by the government is very worrying. This is yet another usurpation of the powers of the National Council, as only it – in accordance with the constitution and statutes – has the power to control the media in any way. Here, the government, is assuming ownership functions with another unlawful decision. There is no legal basis for this for various reasons. Among other things, this is because the media are not mentioned in

the aforementioned law. TVN and Polsat are said to have some communication activity. This does not affect Polsat to such a significant extent, as it has companies in both the energy and telecommunications sectors. In the case of TVN, such activity is absolutely marginal. The law states that in order for a company to be covered, it must be carrying out communication activities. And here we have a complete margin simply related to the broadcasting of the programme to the leading broadcasters' stations. If we have a situation where the so-called protection of the government extends to a company that we know is in financial trouble – because if it wasn't, it wouldn't have gone up for sale – what does that mean? This means a willingness to support either the owner themselves or the community behind the company.

In the context of the liquidation of public media, this means their liquidation. Perhaps an asset, and certainly the advertising stream will be redirected to the one covered. This reasoning is further supported by the fact that the new media law prohibits public media from using advertising, which means that a large chunk of the advertising market, worth around PLN 1 billion in 2023, is to be redirected to commercial media. Is this the danger of this new media law, which has undergone 'pseudo-consultations'? I say 'pseudo' because not everyone was invited, e.g. the Association of Polish Journalists. The National Council was invited, but none of our demands were taken into account.

This entire proposal is intended to turn the National Broadcasting Council into a completely facade and toothless body. I am trying to rebuild the council's



Jolanta Hajdasz, Maciej Świrski

capacity to respond to business abuse. This has gone on for years, despite the fact that the council somehow had the power. However, firstly, they were disregarded by the market, and secondly, people got used to the fact that even if there were major market abuses, the council would just wag its finger or possibly impose a fine of PLN 2,000, which is rather insignificant for a company with annual revenues of PLN 1.5 billion. My attempts to restore precisely the council's efficiency in this matter are met with attacks and accusations of unfair treatment or attempted censorship. Hence the charges against me before the State Tribunal. Well, at this point I give the example of another regulator from another country. It seems like an exotic example, but I am going to mention it here. In the United States, the regulator of the drugs and products that people consume, the FDA, has not been responsive to the emergence of the oxycontin epidemic. The Sackler brothers' pharmaceutical company marketed a painkiller, advertising that it had no side effects. In this way, the drug and its advertising were aimed at doctors rather than patients. These in turn, seduced by various gifts, training and so on, began to prescribe this remedy to their patients. In the United States, health care is what it is. People would rather buy medicine than go to the doctor and pay for additional tests. Doctors, knowing how patients functioned, were happy to prescribe oxycontin because it was not supposed to be addictive or cause side effects. Thus, the epidemic of oxycontin addiction – and later drug addiction – moved

from pathological environments to others, such as working-class environments in the Appalachians, professions like mechanics and miners. Miners who had accidents in the mine went to the doctor and were given oxycontin. As a consequence, they became addicted and turned into dependents. It all started in the early 1990s, in 1993 to be precise, and lasted until around 2017. All these years, the regulatory authority did not react, despite feedback from the market. They couldn't believe that a pharmaceutical company would lie on its leaflets and in its entire marketing campaign. I mention this because this comparison shows what regulatory inaction in the market looks like. The National Broadcasting Council, the regulator, has been virtually inactive all these years. There were only brief reactions when something happened, but in reality there was no response to negative phenomena in the media, primarily disinformation and lies. I'm trying to bring that back, or bring it in at all, which involves attacks on my person. Never mind. It is important that those in power want to have some kind of regulatory body formally in place. This is required by European Union directives, including the one introduced under the name EMFA, the European Media Freedom Act, but they want this regulator to exist only formally, while the market is left completely unregulated – just as it is now, and this will only get worse. The public media, which is in the opinion of many unnecessary, actually have set a certain standard, which may soon be missing.

Mariusz Pilis: With the current development of the commercial market, public television has permanently lost the opportunity to offer viewers the content it offered until 19th December last year. This role has now been taken over by Telewizja Republika. It also took over the market, albeit artificially and very violently indeed. A second TV station, wPolsce24, has also appeared. Both are conservative in nature, i.e. they fill a certain content and need that the Polish viewer was looking for. This means that public television, even if it is rebuilt and revitalised, will have to fight very hard for people and for the market, because viewers will have no reason to change their preferences. This year has brought us a vision of complete disaster for public television and

I would be reassured to know that Poland would make the effort to invest technologically when rebuilding the public media and leaving behind the declining technology we are used to, i.e. linear television based on a screen and broadcast studio. Only non-linear broadcasting of mission-oriented content using the latest technologies will secure the future of public media.

public media in general. The question is: are there any reflections at the moment on how to sort out this situation, at a time of possible political change in Poland, which may also affect this area?

Maciej Świrski: First, it is unclear how long it will last. I am rather optimistic, but let's assume it will be a longer period. There will indeed be various dark predictions that are running through our heads. Technological developments at the moment are

'expository'. This means the emergence of new technologies. Not only AI, but also new broadcasting technologies, including production technologies. In the event of a disaster, the collapse of public television or public media, it will be possible to use the backwardness allowance during reconstruction. Three years ago, virtually no one, apart from specialists, knew what artificial intelligence was. In three years – seven years count as a year – that is 21 years in normal life, not technological. When the public media are rebuilt – and sooner or later this must happen, because public media are indispensable in the social life of any democratic state – it will be possible to apply the latest solutions, which we cannot even imagine at the moment. Commercial televi-

sion stations, regardless of whether it is TVN or Republika, must plan their business. Certain activities are unavailable to them or will not pay off in the foreseeable future. The state, on the other hand, through public media and the actions of the National Council regulator, can bring about the introduction of the latest technologies regardless of the higher than usual costs. There is also a discussion of building and bringing Poland to a completely different

technological level. One example is augmented reality, which is currently a rapidly developing technology and, when combined with AI, offers completely new possibilities. In short: it is, so to speak, a digital overlay on the reality as seen through the lens. I would be reassured to know that Poland would make the effort to invest technologically when rebuilding the public media and leaving behind the declining technology we are used to, i.e. linear television based on a screen and broadcast studio. Only non-linear broadcasting of mission-oriented content using the latest technologies will secure the future of public media. However, Poland would have to meet certain conditions. Firstly, it would have to be a democratic country at last. Secondly, it has to take advantage of all its opportunities for development. Thirdly, and vitally, those in power must understand technology. Unfortunately, Polish politicians understand the word 'technology' to mean something completely different from what technology actually is.

Krzysztof Skowroński: Has the National Broadcasting Council intervened on archives that are either destroyed or not accessible to the public?

Maciej Świrski: Unfortunately, we were denied answers to these questions. In accordance with Article 10, I also asked liquidator Daniel Gorgosz about the archives and got no answer.

Krzysztof Skowroński: Because the legal order has been violated. Do you call for the National Broadcasting

Council to be given back the power to elect supervisory boards?

Maciej Świrski: We haven't discussed it yet. It is like a second priority when it comes to day-to-day operations. The most important thing at the moment is to ensure that the legal order in Poland is maintained. And the legal order, as it has been until now, is that the National Media Council is responsible for management and governance, while the National Council is responsible for day-to-day supervision and regulation. However, I must admit that I am considering a public campaign to restore powers in relation to the appointment of management boards. At the moment this model, in my opinion, has run out of steam and there is no point for it.

Thank you very much. I wish you fruitful deliberations and please accept my warmest thanks from the National Council to the Association of Polish Journalists in the person of its current and former president for this support and for the fact that we are supported by the community, because this is extremely important. In the National Council, all but one of the members are simply journalists and we come from that background. Consequently, this is very important to us and we thank you very much for it. And please also speak out publicly, not only in defence of the National Council, but also on the issues we are discussing here. That is, the more we speak up, the more they will hold back. This is my belief. Thank you very much. ■

IN SHORT, IT WAS A BETRAYAL

JACEK KURSKI

PRESIDENT OF THE MANAGEMENT BOARD
OF TVP S.A. IN 2016-2022



Tomorrow marks one year since the violent takeover of television and the unprecedented event of the television signal being shut off. For the first time since 13 December 1981, when *Teleranek* was switched off. The diagnosis is very simple and brutal. We are governed by people whose condition for maintaining their rule is an information monopoly. This means that these people are incapable of governing, they govern poorly and against the interests of Poles, so their only chance of remaining in power is to win the votes of people who are losing out under their rule. Because the only thing that can keep them in power is manipulating people – convincing them that, say, hating Law and Justice is more important than looking

dominated television at the time and were subservient to President Wałęsa. President Zaorski was a drift towards lynching the first non-communist prime minister and non-communist government in the last week of Prime Minister Olszewski's term. A desperate move was made by appointing Senator Zbigniew Romaszewski as president of the television station. He didn't change this situation in terms of quality. It was just a symbolic gesture of an assessment that this was probably the driver influencing public opinion. Let me remind you that public television

We are governed by people whose condition for maintaining their rule is an information monopoly.

after their own interests. And this model always worked when the right wing was in power.

Jan Olszewski's government in 1992 went through nothing short of a political lynching. I watched this up close as assistant director of the Television News Agency. This fight was lost by the post-communist forces that absolutely

had a 100% market share in 1992. The licensing process had only just begun in December 1993. The biggest mistake made by the right wing at that time, in terms of governance, was that it failed to make television loyal to the Polish national interest. That was the final straw. The second case of this kind, I would remind you, was between 2005

and 2007. Television still had a 56–57% market share at the time. It had a lot more than we do nowadays. There was also this sense, of some kind of atrophy of will, fear, psychopanic in the face of these prevailing post-communist liberal forces on television. Please remember how power was lost in 2007. By social engineering operations spread by public television, allegedly controlled by Law and Justice. In 2006–2007, first President Bronisław Wildstein, then President Andrzej Urbanowski. Let me remind you: when Law and Justice was on the verge of victory, suddenly an operation called 'Mrs Beata Sawicka weeps in front of the cameras.' An organised campaign of psychopantics, of the type that significantly reverses public sentiment. A social perception is emerging that Law and Justice is pushing things too far. The second such operation is the Tusk–Kaczyński debate, which should not have happened at all. Jarosław Kaczyński won the debate with Kwaśniewski, Kwaśniewski won the debate with Tusk, so according to the law of transitivity: if A is greater than B, and B is greater than C, then A is greater than C. There is no longer any need to prove that Kaczyński is better than Tusk. But it did happen. What's going on? There is a kind of media lynching of the incumbent Prime Minister on public television, supposedly run by Law and Justice, by the militias of the largest opposition party brought on television. A debate that should be substantive is simply one big set-up to kill off the ruling government. Why am I talking about it? What was this forceful takeover of television by Tusk all about? This

was based on an analysis of what had happened during the eight years preceding their loss of power, between 2015 and 2023. Well, for the first time, and this Tusk understood, the patriotic forces have regained control of the public medium. Public media such as *Telewizja Polska* and, to a lesser extent, *Polskie Radio*. They gained controllability and made it loyal to the Polish conservative option, a medium of communication with a significant electorate. Real pluralism has emerged. Between 2015 and 2023, there was real pluralism in Poland for the first time since 1989. To simplify matters and avoid going into detail, there were two major camps: the liberal-left and the conservative-patriotic, both of which had the means to communicate with their huge electorates. There was real freedom. Anyone who wanted to know something could turn on Polish television, could turn on TVN, knew everything. However, Tusk loses in a pluralistic environment. When there is real pluralism, the option that governs badly and has nothing to offer the Polish people must lose. Therefore, having narrowly failed to beat Law and Justice by a few percentage points in October 2023, they drew conclusions from this. There is no going back to the situation before 15th October. Tusk knew that his first decision had to be to kill the television. I don't want to brag, but the first decision made by Tusk's government was to dismiss me from the World Bank, and the next day they took over the television. Such a coincidence of facts. He is also driven by a mad desire for revenge against the man who embodies

the direction of television, which he associates with four lost elections. Although I think this was a side-effect of good, open TV reclaiming the market in the areas of series, entertainment and sport. Making normal television, to which the pro-government message was stuck. Tusk saw this as a loss of power. His revenge is to ensure that this hydra never grows back again. Please take note of what happened last week. Tusk has put on the list, I mean, he pretends to put on the list, because this is in general some kind of comedy of the law as we understand it. He included TVN on the list of strategic companies in the area of media, where the strategic company with 100% state ownership is Telewizja Polska. This does not interest him at all. He lists TVN as a strategic company. Why? Because it leads to the destruction of a public medium such as TVP.

President Świrski mentioned that there is a collapse of TVP. A collapse that will leave you in ruins. Tusk hopes that if, God forbid, he ever loses power – although logic dictates that once he has gained power, he will never give it up – but just in case, if that happens, there will be nothing left to collect, only ruins. So that there would be Info with 1% viewership, so that there would be Channel Two with 6% viewership. These things are simply horrendous. And what is constitutive of its interests is TVN. This is his cudgel, his whip, his medium that gives the narrative, just as, say, ‘Gazeta Wyborcza’ did in the first decade of the Third Republic for the Rywin affair. For those 13 years when ‘Gazeta Wyborcza’ was this banner of liberal media and set the tone, the narrative and then it was all spread to others and created a media front. Now it’s TVN. It shows Tusk’s



Jacek Kurski, Jolanta Hajdasz

intentions. To destroy the public medium so that it never happens again, and maintain the quasi-monopoly. Fortunately, TVN’s monopoly can be broken by Republika and wPolsce24. And here’s a flavour of how I respond to allegations that TVP was allegedly political. And what is TVN like? Do you remember Donald Tusk’s tasty statement from April or March this year, when he said to Hołownia and Kosiniak: listen, we lent you some votes in the October elections? It was an operation in the form of exploiting the laws of Polish ordination. The point is that the second or third group on the list, in order to defeat Law and Justice, must exceed the natural threshold, i.e. 8 or 9%. Just as the PSL has always had. However, 14–15% would be needed to win seats in every constituency, and in some even two seats. Well, Tusk stated that he lent votes to the Third Way (Trzecia Droga). He said: we will now get back the votes we lent you. How did Tusk lend votes to another party? Did the Platform voters receive instructions: listen, names beginning with the letters G, H or S, i.e. let’s say 1/5 of the Platform’s electorate, you have to vote for Hołownia and Kosiniak? There was no such message. By all means, as that would have been absurd and impractical. No one would understand it. Well, the votes were lent by TVN switching sides. Until two weeks before the 15th October elections, TVN ignored Trzecia Droga (the Third Way) and Hołownia. They were either ridiculed or absent there. And suddenly, on 1st October, the results of the analyses were available to the Platform. This coincided with

the sending of text messages to people in which constituency they should go, e.g. to Sulejówek from Warsaw, in order to take votes away from Law and Justice in the Ostrołęka-Mińsk-Węgrów constituency, because in Warsaw, these votes will not do much for Platform, but they will do there. This was correlated with the action of optimising the electoral result by district. On top of that, TVN’s change of stance, suddenly pumping us up from 8-9%. There were doubts as to whether Hołownia would even cross the electoral threshold. As a result of being pumped up by TVN for a fortnight. And as Hołownia has 14.4%, Law and Justice loses power.

Jolanta Hajdasz: However, my question concerns the public media and what happened in December 2023. In your opinion, was this scenario inevitable? Could something have been done to simply not give away TV and radio and PAP so easily?

Jacek Kurski: Of course it was possible to avoid, because television, as one of the few state agencies, had all the legal, institutional and social assets to defend itself against this kind of takeover. Firstly, there was a law that clearly defined the special status of television and the special statutory bodies entitled to elect authorities. There was protection from the Constitutional Court, there was a series of legal actions that guaranteed this, but above all, there was live transmission. I mean, walking onto live television without any preparation. From their point of view, it was completely unprofitable, because it creates a kind of founding myth. They have to enter with tanks, enter on foot,

they have to enter with a steamroller. Television shows it all the time. I mean, those who argued against the united right wing under the banner of freedom suddenly resort to brutal for-

It was a mental acceptance of giving up television without a fight, in a situation where MPs were waiting and felt that they were defending freedom and defending the ramparts.

ce to take over. And if the president had been there, if the management board had been there ready to fight, then Telewizja Polska could have become a kind of, I don't want to use big words, but because I met Jarosław Kaczyński during the strike at the Gdańsk Shipyard in May 1988, it is easy for me to imagine a small bastion of resistance against the oppression of the 13th December Coalition. It would grow and swell, in terms of numbers, because there would be live coverage all the time that they were pushing on. And you could make some kind of small mess there, a small Gdańsk Shipyard, and above all, a point of resistance showing the brutality of these people. Unfortunately, the opposite has happened. The landing operation, which had been in preparation for several months, began with TVP Sport. I don't want to go into details now, but it involved deploying an assault group. After 2-3 days they were ready to broadcast from the S7 studio, the new Clean Water programme with Czyż and Schnepf. Unfortunately, this took place with tacit approval. It must also be clearly stated that after a year, this kind of semi-darkness of understatements and mystery, this

kind of stinking warmth surrounding the veil of this situation is, in my opinion, morally unbearable. An obvious betrayal of a part of our camp that made a deal with the invaders and simply

opened the doors of television to be taken over in absolute safety and peace. In the greatest and most noble act of patriotism and morality, Law and Justice MPs occupied the main building of Telewizja Polska on the 10th floor. They felt they were in control of the situation, while the real drama was unfolding elsewhere. The director of the corporate affairs office went off television, invited the self-appointed or illegally appointed Sienkiewicz, the chairman of the Supervisory Board, Zemla, and the figurehead, the supposed CEO, Sygut, into the car. He invited them into his Skoda Suberp, drove through the barrier, entered the minus 1 car park and via the management lift, to the 10th floor the two men were led by the director of corporate affairs. There, the acting president was waiting for them with the company transfer protocol ready. In a sort of moral vigilance, a group of Law and Justice MPs with Marek Suski, Sebastian Łukaszewicz, Dariusz Matecki, Marcin Małcki and several other colleagues, as well as Joanna Borowiak MP, barged into this office and prevented the signature from being affixed. Despite this, a photograph of the finished protocol ready for signing quickly circulated on social media.

It was a mental acceptance of giving up television without a fight, in a situation where MPs were waiting and felt that they were defending freedom and defending the ramparts. It was as if attention had been diverted from what was really at the heart of the process. So, it's just a show of activity on Powstańców Square, so that they can quietly sign documents in their offices on Woronicza Street. Some thought they took part in defending television. Others at that time, who unfortunately had this signature, handed television over on a plate.

And secondly, could it have been any different? Of course, it could have been different if it had been understood that it was not the main building, not the 10th floor, where, incidentally, the president was not even present, because he had slipped away to Republika TV and was calling Adamczyk, Pereira and Tulicki from there to come to Republika. It is unclear why they chose Republika, apart from the television building, which happens to need defending. TVP Info's studios and Building H, the broadcast, are important. If only people understood that

Some thought they took part in defending television. Others at that time, who unfortunately had this signature, handed television over on a plate.

these are two sides of television. I was in Washington at the time, communicating with high-ranking members of the Law and Justice party, explaining that they had to go there immediately... However, it is difficult for MPs, for Marshal Witek, to rush with a hoe to Building H, which has already been



Jacek Kurski

infiltrated by special services agencies. It was possible to defend television by defending TVP Info studios, defending broadcasts, borrowing, for example, 200 security guards from Orlen to protect another state-owned company, seeing that some of the television's se-

curity assets were already being taken over and committing treason. It was possible to fight back. It could have been a kind of founding act and symbol of resistance, a beautiful memento of those few years when television was truly the voice of Poland in every home. It turned out differently. ■

WITHOUT LAW AND WITHOUT THE PRINCIPLES OF A DEMOCRATIC STATE

MICHAŁ ADAMCZYK

PRESIDENT OF TVP S.A., APPOINTED ON
26 DECEMBER 2023 BY THE NATIONAL MEDIA
COUNCIL TO THE POSITION OF PRESIDENT OF THE
MANAGEMENT BOARD OF TVP S.A., FROM 2024
PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF TELEWIZJA WPOLSCIE24



Was it possible to prevent the illegal takeover of public media? No. Could it have been delayed, made more difficult? Definitely yes. President Jacek Kurski has already said a lot about it. I will add a few things that were not taken care of, but could have been implemented. Some people, including politicians, were lulled into a false sense of security, because questions were asked about whether public media are properly secured, whether they are protected, and the answers were often affirmative. Yes. However, it was definitely necessary to strengthen protection, to strengthen protection for private companies, it was possible to use Orlen's protection or any other. Unfortunately, this was not done. We should also strengthen the protection of building H, where the broadcast is located. We should consider an alternative form of transmitting the signal. It should be some kind of streaming right away. All this was not done, but I would like to address one more issue raised, because it is current and extremely important. Public

opinion, or at least a large part of it, was outraged by the information about the entry of the TVN station – or rather the announcement, although the government has already adopted a regulation on this matter – on the list of strategic companies. Telewizja w Polsce24, ladies and gentlemen, has come across some interesting information.

It turns out that the alleged Hungarian capital gathered around the largest Hungarian television station, TV2, is fake news. This is not true. The Hungarians gathered around TV2 did not hold any talks regarding the takeover of TVN. This information was released on purpose to justify the inclusion or announcement of the inclusion of TVN on the list of strategic companies. We also found out another piece of information that German capital is planning to buy TVN. The fact that Warner wants to sell TVN is a generally known truth, although the process has not formally started yet.

All of this is probably to be done through Bank of America, but there are no details yet. Nothing has been

formally announced. And what is happening? The Germans are interested in buying it, but the price is too high. After the television is entered on the list of strategic companies, it may turn out that the market value will start to fall, because any investor who wants to invest money may start to think about it, because the company is starting to be governed by different rules. Market rules are not applied here. In connection with this, there will be fewer people willing to invest. But if an investor appears who wants to buy for 1/3, it will be possible. So how? An example investor, a German one, buys the TVN station for 1/3. The owner, of course, may not agree to this, i.e. the Americans, because they want the full amount. Then the government already has the instruments and possibilities to pay extra for the purchase. It adds money, maybe even add a billion dollars more in order to sell the company to specific hands. And then everyone is happy. The government is happy because it has control. The Americans are happy because they received the money and the buyer is happy. This is an operation and a scenario that is most likely. Let us also recall the words of Chairman Świrski that the government here is taking on ownership functions. Everything is done with complete bypassing of the National Broadcasting Council, bypassing the law and violating the rules of a democratic state, but these were the announcements of Donald Tusk's government. This is how it happens, that the law will not always be the most important and the same thing happened in the case of taking over public media.

Hence the answer to the first question, could it have been prevented? No, it could not have been prevented due to the fact that the provisions of the law are not currently respected in Poland. The authorities do not respect the rulings, judgments, decisions, of both the Constitutional Tribunal and the Supreme Court. There was a specific position of the Constitutional Tribunal. Of course, not respected by the authorities. Unfortunately, any efforts in this legal field could not have helped much.

Jolanta Hajdasz: Does this mean that public media are such an unintentional, additional victim of the takeover of power in Poland after last year's elections? The government doesn't really care what happens to them. Besides, they believe that they shouldn't have any influence on public opinion?

Michał Adamczyk: Public media are not an additional, but the main victim, because that was the beginning of the entire operation, which aims to prevent people from learning about subsequent moves, such as taking over the National Prosecutor's Office. These were the assumptions and this goal was consistently achieved. We have information that preparations for this operation were made for a very long time. We have information that, unfortunately, television was given up lightly. If the resistance on Woronicza had continued, it would have looked completely different. These images would have gone out into the world. The authorities would perhaps not have used force, they would have thought a little longer and perhaps the media would have been taken over a little later. This

atmosphere of uncertainty related to the illegal takeover would have grown. The atmosphere would have thickened, all this would have been shown. The social mood was also very specific. We remember that period when people spontaneously gathered at Powstańców Square or the march of opponents of

[...] the illegal takeover could not be prevented, it could have been made more difficult.

the repressive actions of the current government. However, the illegal takeover could not be prevented, it could have been delayed. Perhaps public media could have operated longer, but they were improperly, insufficiently secured to allow this resistance to last longer.

Discussion

Mariusz Pilis: I have a question for Mr. President Adamczyk. That time, as I remember it from the end of last year, was marked by great chaos. It happened on the line between Plac Powstańców Warszawy, the headquarters of the Television Information Agency, and the headquarters of the television, i.e. Woronicza. I remember a lot of recordings from that time, private cell phone recordings. They showed that equipment was being moved from the square, that a large, one of the most modern in Europe, if not the most modern, digital studio was ceasing to work. What did this chaos look like, which has not been described to this day? We do not know exactly what happened. We only know

that someone was taking away cameras, someone was taking away cables. Generally, there were situations that we know from literature, I would even call it looting. Were there any records kept? Was anyone in control? What did it look like? Because those who were registered on their mobile phones were

very often people who pretended that they weren't actually there.

Michał Adamczyk: On December 20, we demanded that the security prepare information about who was taking the equipment away. Those people who came showed up with some warehouse receipts. It was impossible to control the removal of equipment from Plac Powstańców Warszawy, due to the fact that it took place at different hours, sometimes also at night, and through different entrances. This equipment was carried out on their backs, taken out through the garage. The operation had started much earlier. At that time, we didn't know that the usurpers would abandon Plac Powstańców Warszawy. It would not have occurred to us that they would want to give up state-of-the-art equipment. The TVP Info studios, the News studio were the most modern television studios in Poland.

Krzysztof Skowroński: But they are gone? Have they been dismantled?

Michał Adamczyk: There is nothing there anymore. There are empty walls there.

Krzysztof Skowroński: And there is no big studio?



Michał Adamczyk, Wojciech Surmacz

Michał Adamczyk: There is none. There are empty walls there.

Krzysztof Skowroński: And what happened to all of it?

Michał Adamczyk: Some of it was taken away. Where is it now? We have no idea.

Krzysztof Skowroński: But is it used for television? Somewhere on Woronicza or is it simply not there? How much did that studio cost? The most modern one, which was TVP Info?

Jacek Kurski: Around 20 million, I think. Some of those assets were moved to a new hall and new studios. However, a certain technological coherence, which gave such a synergistic quality resulting from the combination of the latest technologies, augmented reality and all those LEDs, was destroyed. In a realistic sense, some of this equipment ended up in Woronicza. Besides, in the hall that was supposed to be a production hall for large formats. Everything is turned upside down, some of it has certainly disappeared and this will have to be explained at some point.

Michał Adamczyk: It will only be possible to check this after returning to Telewizja Polska. However, we can

only rely on information provided by people who are there. Thanks to this, we also have information, for example, that a large part of production is being moved outside. And this is programs that were made by Telewizja Polska crews. I am talking here about the program "Strefa starcia", which was replaced by "Bez retuszu". It was made by Telewizja Polska forces, however, after the usurpers entered, the production was moved outside. The production of the first episode of "Bez retuszu" cost 10 times more than the flagship, typical production of an episode of "Strefa starcia". Ten times higher costs – and the company is in liquidation.

Mariusz Pilis: I would like to ask the presidents to comment on one resolution, I think, of the current management of Telewizja Polska in liquidation. Namely, the simplification of settlement procedures with external companies, where up to PLN 100,000 no cost estimates need to be presented. This is theft... I'll tell you what it's all about. Generally, Telewizja Polska conducted a number of activities that involved cooperation with the external market. There were quite a few producers who produced on behalf of Telewizja Polska. I think that's the case today, only they are completely different producers. In each of these cases, when it came to the implementation of production and later to the settlement of everything we call production, budget, expenses, etc. This required very meticulous calculations: presenting all possible invoices and everything related to a given production. In fact, the ladies from Telewizja Polska's finances joked that this

included the toothbrush. Such costs should have been taken into account, described and purchase documents presented for this. At some point this year, a – in my opinion – scandalous decision was made: “From today on, we will not settle productions that amount to PLN 100,000. We do not have to present post-

I clearly assess this decision as scandalous and I treat it as such a loophole to withdraw money from public television.

production cost estimates that realistically specify the costs incurred for a given production”. This is a situation that I, producing for Telewizja Polska as a private producer, have encountered for the first time. And to be honest, I would like to have such conditions, because it simply releases me from any liability for the penny spent. In other words, if I spend up to PLN 100,000, at least that’s what it sounded like in media releases, and I actually spend PLN 10,000 on production, I am able to keep PLN 90 for myself. I do not have to settle this. Please comment.

Michał Adamczyk: I see it as a loophole to withdraw money, just as Mariusz Pilis mentioned. If we don’t have to settle up to 100 thousand, let’s imagine a series of public affairs programmes, the actual production cost of which is, for example, around 20 thousand, and here it turns out that you can get 5 times more. I clearly assess this decision as scandalous and I treat it as such a loophole to withdraw money from public television. We have already talked a bit about the position of television on the market. Let’s do it again, because it is worth emphasizing. Until

2023, Telewizja Polska, the public broadcaster in Poland, was a phenomenon on the Central and Eastern European market. In no other country did public television have such a strong, unequivocally dominant, of course, fighting for this primacy with TVN, but a very strong position on the market. In other coun-

tries in our part of Europe, this position is often marginal, does not exceed a few percent. The effects of what is happening today will be felt for many years. They may never be repaired. Other stations will consolidate their position on the market and reconstruction on such a scale, in my opinion, will no longer be possible. And money is still being siphoned off. And this is precisely what such new provisions are for.

Jolanta Hajdasz: President Kurski, I would like you to comment on the method of constructing result cost estimates and siphoning off money in this way. Whatever we say about television today, its viewership, which has fallen so dramatically, is saved by films. Series produced during the presidencies of Jacek Kurski and Mateusz Matyszkowicz. They did not produce anything for 12 months, nothing new that could be used to simply fight for viewers in prime time. And this also shows the type of destruction of public television when they deprive themselves of the obvious tools they had.

Jacek Kurski: This is an obvious crime. I mean, these people can’t imagine that it’s possible to run television

honestly and not steal. It was a great surprise, a shock, that they thought that they would take revenge on me personally, for example, by getting caught for some scam. They literally ripped up the floors. Four of my directors, whom I appointed during my presidency, met with me to tell me the same message. They were offered miracle wreaths, competitive clauses, high amounts or severance payments, or maintaining their positions and staying on television on very high salaries, just to put me and our team from those 2016-2022 years on the air. They simply have nothing, they had nothing. The same thing was done, the same offers to some external producers, who were also promised lucrative multi-million productions for many years in advance, just to put Kurski and anyone from our joint team on air. They judge us by themselves. That is, they can’t imagine that you can run a television station for 7 years and not steal a single zloty. After the resolution mentioned here, you can see that they have no brakes at all. If a program costs up to PLN 100,000, that’s a lot of money, you don’t have to calculate it using a cost estimate, because it can cost PLN 29, it can cost PLN 18, and the cost estimate will be PLN 95,000. This is something unheard of. They will probably create new titles for camouflage, so that there is no benchmark that the same title cost PLN 18 and now costs PLN 81, only two numbers will be changed. They will create new programs, which in turn contradicts the logic of liquidating a television station. If a television station is in liquidation, it cannot create

new programs, new units, or employ people. This shows not only the whole paradox, but the legal or illegal chutzpah of taking over a television station. There is no such thing as TVP S.A. in liquidation. The Broadcasting Act of 29 December 1992 clearly states that the audiovisual market in Poland is organised into companies with specific names. TVP S.A., Polskie Radio S.A., not in liquidation. Courts enter something there. And enter someone as liquidators, so we have the appearance of this legalism. However, this is a matter of force. I mean, courts are very opportunistic, they see who wins. If force wins, they beat force. This unclear legal status at the beginning and the three-time refusal to enter these illegal authorities in the National Court Register, created a legal dimension of the possibility of maintaining this bastion. We forgot to mention this. Although they understand the law, apply it as they understand it, even their registry courts, that is, the courts of the Third Polish Republic refused to enter it. This created a certain legal and social climate for this bastion to last. This is just a digression. The fact that they are snatching these cost estimates is horrendous. They are now abolishing the computer system, the IT system that allowed internal production to be accounted for in a very transparent manner. They are abolishing this system, which means that they are taking a series of actions that are simply to create a grey area, to create space for theft, to rob this company. They cannot imagine that it is possible to do otherwise. It is very sad. ■

I LEFT THE COMPANY IN A VERY GOOD FINANCIAL SITUATION

WOJCIECH SURMACZ

PRESIDENT OF THE POLISH PRESS AGENCY
IN 2018-2023



Jolanta Hajdasz: I will ask one more question: is there really no way to stop this? I am going to complicate our discussion a little further, because we have been joined by Mr Wojciech Surmacz, former president of the Polish Press Agency. We're happy to see you doing well and to have you here with us, in good health. Let's add three things to the discussion about the PAP. What is the situation after 12 months of placing this company in a completely new reality?

Wojciech Surmacz: Sorry for being late, but I can actually say that for the first time in my life, I managed to walk in like Jacek Kurski, because that's how he always came to meetings. There was no way to miss President Kurski. As for our health – and I mean this quite seriously – we pay the price for what happened, including with our own well-being. Not just me, but many other people I know, not just from the PAP, from the public media. How is PAP? Hard to say. I have no insight into what is going on inside, nor how the budget looks. I left the company in a very good financial situation. It's hard for me to say at the moment. The situation there is completely different than in television. The PAP is regulated by a separate law,

so we were shocked that we were sort of lumped together. We also had to be defended, and the change in positions of authority was brutal. We were prepared really for many different scenarios, but not for this one. We never considered the force option. Never. How come? In the case of Telewizja Polska, especially TVP Info, the assessment is very straightforward. Viewership is at the level of statistical error. Of course, I'm exaggerating, but that's the way it is.

Jolanta Hajdasz: TVP Info has a year-on-year drop of more than 70, probably even 75% already.

Wojciech Surmacz: Oh, it's a disaster. It can hardly even be called a decline. There is simply no such thing.

Jolanta Hajdasz: And these main channels are also recording a 15%, 20% and 30% drop in viewership.

Wojciech Surmacz: I believe that this is irrecoverable. This represents the lost share of public media in the market. They will never come back. Literally yesterday I met up with friends from abroad. I will not name exactly from where, for the sake of their safety.

They were representatives of, let's say, our National Broadcasting Council. They just happened to have a meeting in Warsaw yesterday. They were like Balkan 'KRRiTs' (National Broadcasting Council): Slovenia, Albania, Croatia, etc., from several countries. They had

come? Is that it? When I explained it to them, they couldn't understand. They explained to each other that Donald Tusk was behind it. 'You know, it's Tusk, the one who was before von der Leyen, that's him.' 'Yeah, that's him.' It was only a year after these events that these

We were prepared really for many different scenarios, but not for this one. We never considered the force option. Never.

a training session, very interesting, on democracy and the free media market in Poland. They are my friends. We still know each other from my work at the PAP. I told them about what happened a year ago. They had a contrast because the training was more or less related to this field. In Albania, for example, there are going to be elections in May and they were given instructions on how to ensure that the media covered these campaigns objectively. Their first question was why they heard about it from me and why there was no mention of it in the Western media. To which I say: listen, I sent and distributed this information to foreign media outlets. I remember at the time Onet was so enthusiastic that no one had picked it up and that it was probably fake. They insisted that I hadn't sent it to anyone. That wasn't entirely true, because about 30 German regional newspapers reported this information, which had the desired effect on the other side. I am talking about the Ministry of Culture and the then Minister of Culture. My friends were in shock. How is it even possible in the middle of Europe? Their question was easy: how

people got to know about the takeover of the media in Poland. The head of the Greek Press Agency told me a story that they had experienced a similar situation. 15–20 years ago, it was basically the same thing: a forceful takeover of public media. He stated that the political group that had been in power for about two years at that time never returned to power. It ceased to exist. These are the consequences. That's all I can say. I am unable to comment on the situation at the Polish Press Agency. I read other media, I see that they buy the service and it works. We had a very beautiful message, for example, about the 25th or 30th anniversary, such a beautiful anniversary of the embassy of the People's Republic of China in Poland. Written in such poetic language, such a beautiful message, as if taken straight from the 1970s, not even the 1980s. This is proof that PAP works.

Hubert Bekrycht: And just now, I was about to ask a question to Presidents Adamczyk and Kurski, but my former president came in. Of course, I'll ask that question later. Wojtek, do you remember when you were sitting upstairs next to Law and Justice MPs and



Michał Adamczyk, Wojciech Surmacz

Krzysztof Skowroński was broadcasting from downstairs that you were still going on. It was the most bizarre experience. You can joke about it, but the horror of the situation was palpable. I didn't know if this was perhaps some kind of virtual reality. I wanted to ask you because you were there all the time. They came in and informed you that, basically, you were no longer the president, but they were generously giving you your office back. At the time, I was interviewing you. There was no one brave enough in the newsroom anymore, as they had all been fired. As the correspondent from Łódź, I had to interview Wojtek. And Wojtek spoke of an unprecedented situation. Namely, the head of the Solidarity Workers' Commission – I know that the TV

presidents and all of us, this Solidarity is close to our hearts – but the head of Solidarity, Marek Błoński, took over the PAP by force. Even more clumsy for not securing his computer and smartphone screen with an 'entry group'. Something like this doesn't even happen in small countries. I don't want to shame anyone here. In contrast, it was like a banana republic and they should be ashamed of themselves.

Jolanta Hajdasz: I think they should be held responsible for it. Shame doesn't cut it. It's crime without punishment.

Hubert Bekrycht: Who switched off the TV signal? I will first ask the President of the PAP. Now, months later, after exactly one year, would you do anything differently when it comes to securing?

Wojciech Surmacz: Anita Gargas was in, Krzysztof Skowronski was also in, Hubert Bekrycht was in. These people saw with their own eyes what it looked like. We saw some of this in Republika, and we saw some of this on Telewizja Trwam. At first, we even saw a little bit on Polsat and even on TVN24, because I let everyone inside. There was no segregation, everyone could come in, record, do whatever they wanted.

Jolanta Hajdasz: So a conference on the takeover of public media was held at the National Broadcasting Council, led by dr Agnieszka Głapiak. The National Broadcasting Council published a very detailed timeline of the takeover of public media in two volumes. Two large documents can be downloaded free of charge from the website of the National Broadcasting Council, along with a third document – a presentation on the subject. I refer anyone who is interested in the details to the KRRiT website and sdp.pl.

Wojciech Surmacz: During this conference, from my point of view, two very interesting statements were made. The first by Samuel Pereira, who covered those entries both for radio and television. He said that it was more difficult at PAP because PAP had its own security, while Telewizja Polska had a security agency. Let me tell you this: yes, the PAP had its own security: three security guards who worked in shifts, so basically we had one security guard per day. And in fact, for half a day, because they took turns. Generally, one guy at the front desk. It wasn't about those security guards at all. What could a security guard do when two big

guys, six feet tall and armed with guns, showed up at midnight and pointed their weapons at him? What was the poor lad to do?

Jolanta Hajdasz: I wonder if the current public law media companies have simply already changed these security systems. How many people today are on guard to ensure that someone else does not take over the media in the same way.

Wojciech Surmacz: It was not about the security at all. I would like to refer to Michał Adamczyk's statement that perhaps everything would have turned out differently if certain things had not happened. He didn't finish it. I know what he means, so I'll finish for him. Perhaps things would have turned out differently at the PAP, too, although they did in fact turn out as they should have. We were on the defensive because they went in and out. There was a moment when, together with the MPs who were there, we pushed them out. It mustn't be forgotten. I'll remember these people for the rest of my life. They didn't really go there to make a career, but simply to express their attitude and opposition to what was happening. There were probably some MPs who appeared in front of the cameras, talked in the spotlight and flashbulbs, and left looking good. However, there were also those who stayed the night with me in that office and just did what they had to do. One of them was the one who is reportedly in hiding today – MP Marcin Romanowski. A great guy. On the other hand, if I had had a team like the one at Powstańców Square, we would still be at the PAP today.

Michał Adamczyk: I'd like to mention two things. The first concerns the lawsuit that the neoTVP authorities have filed against me and two other directors. I am not saying this to complain, but to show how concepts are being reversed and reality distorted. We are being blamed for causing losses to Telewizja Polska as a result of the signal interruption. This is an absurdly high amount, but please note the level of absurdity we have already reached.

However, there were also those who stayed the night with me in that office and just did what they had to do.

Who knows, with these courts it may turn out that I will lose this lawsuit, and that I will be the one who has to pay for the signal to be switched off. Firstly, in a situation where I could not govern, although I was entitled to do so. Secondly, we all know very well that they were the ones who switched off the signal. They turned it off unlawfully, of course. By using an 'entry group', police and security companies. Carrying on the infamous tradition of martial law, as the signal had previously been switched off in 1981. Another issue concerns the list of strategic companies, which includes TVN. Prime Minister Donald Tusk says the company is coming under special protection for fear that an investor from the east, for example, could come in. You must all remember very well what happened on the Polish border. I am referring to the operation carried out by the Belarusian and Russian secret services. At the time, the TVN station was

a transmission belt for Belarusian and Russian propaganda concerning precisely the situation on the border. TVN repeated almost word for word what the Belarusian propaganda media were saying about the situation at the border. It is worth remembering who took which narrative and when.

Wanda Nadobnik: I spent 35 years working at TVP and even before that five years at PAP. In my opinion, these losses that have been made

since 19/20 December are impossible to make up. Powstańców Square, which had always been a television location for years, was completely destroyed. Currently only TV World with Mr Michał Broniatowski is in office there now. I don't know, probably Polonia, that's what I've heard. However, Eurowizja (Eurovision) has been completely destroyed. Not Eurovision with song contests, but Telewizja Polska was a member of the news exchange group. We exchanged all the film information and texts. Previously, until around 1991 or 1992, we were a member of Intervision, which included all the people's democracies. During the year, Telewizja Polska became a member of Eurovision. With 80 members at that time, even until the end of 2000, Telewizja Polska was at the forefront in terms of the quality of content and technical equipment. We were ranked 6th after the BBC and such countries. At this moment, all journalists have been

dismissed, meaning that only three remain. Anyway, I think it's mainly retired people who develop and dictate these materials that go to Eurovision. In contrast, the entire technical review is on Woronicza. Production managers sometimes write the texts and send them out. Geneva has just asked if a journalist could start working there. Back then, the texts are written in English and the production managers take the computer translation.

I don't know if this is still the case now, but I know it was the case in the beginning. This is irrecoverable. That is why perhaps no one in the world knows what happened in Poland. And I'll just add that one of the directors, or whatever he is, says: 'And what happens if no news from Poland goes out at all for a fortnight?' Even during the days of Intervision, there was no such thing as no news coming out of Poland. Please see what a loss this is. ■



DISCUSSION

Jolanta Hajdasz

During our conference, I would like to pose a question for us all to consider. Does it have to be this way? Does it have to go on like this? What are your opinions, please?

Jacek Kurski

This is a question about politics. You can talk about public media when you have power. If you don't have power, you don't have access to public media, which means that, in fact, the question is about political perspective. It is difficult but not hopeless. Tusk failed to destroy the opposition as he had planned. The forceful entry into television was meant to be a vanguard and a prefiguration of the crushing of the real opposition in Poland. The 2024 local elections were won on a percentage basis against the Platform at assembly level, while the European elections were tied. It is a political machine that Jarosław Kaczyński managed to save. Crucially, the presidential election must be won. There is a real chance of winning, as evidenced by the actions of the other side to discredit the candidate. Opponents did not anticipate that Law and Justice would come up with such a good idea to support a civic candidate. It seems like he was here a few days ago – you can still smell it – a breath of hope in this room. The entire scheme of crushing the Law and Justice candidate between a rock and

a hard place and fitting him into the usual clichés of being a Law and Justice member is failing. Suddenly, that hammer, that axe hits nothing but air and strikes them in the shin, and they end up chopping off their own leg. The civic candidate defies the usual pattern of hate speech. It is necessary to continuously develop the media, those that already exist, to which a certain stream of hope and a certain kind of community created by Telewizja Polska, i.e. Telewizja Republika and wPolsce24, has been redirected. Bearing in mind, however, that the difference in potentials is enormous all the time. Public television had, let's say, seven million viewers in total for these three main news programmes. Meaning, of course, *Wiadomości* (News), *Panorama* and *Telexpress*. Admittedly, some viewers were likely double counting, so the actual number is probably closer to 5.5 million. However, on a rotational basis, this amounts to several million. Currently, comparing this with the best results achieved by *Dzisiaj* (Today) and *Wiadomości* (News), Nielsen estimates that the audience is only about one million. In reality, it is one million six hundred, one million five hundred, one million seven hundred, but that is still several times less. This is important to know that this is due to the difference in potential. A certain irony of history and a snapshot of the hopelessness we find ourselves in are visible on both television screens, showing fundraising for editing, lighting, etc. After eight years in power, when we had

full authority, we now find ourselves in a situation where we are simply collecting money to pay for studio lighting.

Jolanta Hajdasz

I will only add that the independent media, as Maciej Świrski said, the patriotic media, even in those eight good years for TVP or Polskie Radio, were not so good. We have become accustomed to these collections, this begging for money, accompanying us. I say this with a touch of sarcasm, but the following organisations are also asking for support for the functioning of the media: Radio Wnet, which is always a guest here, Telewizja Trwam or Radio Maryja. They did well, and I'm glad they're there, alongside Republika and wPolsce24. Today, this saves all these media, saves the independence and pluralism in our country, as well as the honour of Polish journalism. I think this is a separate topic that we will come back to.

Jacek Kurski

The public media will be saved when we return to power. We will return to power when this logic of events I have spoken of is fulfilled. At the end of this plan, of course, the opportunity of a change in America must be seized. Up to now, the competitive advantage of Tusk's propaganda groping the Poles has been that we have no allies in the world. They have allies and it should be a benchmark for the Poles on whom to bet. This was a key to regaining power: tormenting society with

the consequences of policies that were in fact caused by Tusk. These include: the climate package, price gouging, inflation caused by the war, tormenting us that there is no national recovery plan, and that they would have done it. In other words, Law and Justice's fault for not having a KPO (National Reconstruction Plan) in a situation where they blocked it rudely. Plus, there is a belief that there will be social fatigue. This enabled them to enter, unfortunately, a hermetised, demobilised right-wing electorate and win by a hair's breadth. The problem is also that once they have gained power, they will not give it up. For a year now, when I occasionally appear on our right-wing televisions, I have been repeating one thing like a mantra: Tusk's plan will lead to no free elections in Poland. Obvious criminal and constitutional offences are already being committed. Examples include the non-implementation of Constitutional Court rulings, the forcible entry into television, the takeover of the prosecutor's office and many other institutions, and the PKW's (National Electoral Commission) withdrawal of subsidies from the only viable opposition party. What does it mean? The PKW itself would then be expected to announce the election and its result in a few months' time. If the Law and Justice candidate, for example, were to win, this would in turn open the way for the party to regain power. As a result, those members of the National Electoral Commission who are committing criminal offences today will be sent to prison. These people were set up by Tusk in a kind of



founding murder: they carried out a ritual murder, so to speak, so that today they are prisoners, dependent on Tusk being in power. It depends precisely on them what election result they pass on. Why am I talking about it? In Poland, the political system has been changed to something resembling an anarcho-creature. A combination of legal anarchy and some, increasingly, aspirations towards dictatorship or Tusk's authoritarianism. It's a real problem. Nevertheless, the most important prospect is for the Polish camp, the United Right, to regain power. And once it has been regained, the idea for public media is simple: rebuild it despite everything, but above all, learn from the mistakes that were made when we were in power. It hits me, as a TV president, that I have as partners in the National Broadcasting Council people who do

not understand that power has to be used. The power that the nation has given you, that the sovereign has given you, you must use for the good of the nation. It cannot be the case that in Poland the market for the distribution of money is shared outside any control of any state institution. That is, there is a telemetry monopolist who does not care about any standards and is not subject to any control. I'm talking about Nielsen, which has such panels, but won't show where. And no National Broadcasting Council has any say in the matter. And the advertising market is shared by three media houses. The United Right buckled down and said: now we are doing a media law, here we will divide, we will tax the commercial media. It turned out that there was pressure. Meanwhile, it would have been very easy to change this system

by giving the National Broadcasting Council real oversight of telemetry. And that's how Telewizja Polska was watched, and those who harmed the vital interests of the Polish state were promoted.

Jolanta Hajdasz

Many will be frightened by these words.

Jacek Kurski

Let them be frightened. There is nothing to lose. They didn't put me in prison for fraud because there was none. So they access medical records, steal files from the Metropolitan Court to find something to finish me off. These are barbaric methods that have never been used before. Let alone what was done recently at a government meeting in a frenzied, totally unlawful attack on my son. o are absolutely thuggish things, but they show who they think they are, who they want to kill, who they want to take revenge on. I believe that our camp should draw conclusions from it. To learn who they take revenge on. By this, you can see what hurt them and who they associate the loss of power with. I would only add that when we return to power, these regulatory issues are fundamental. The right wing was afraid to undermine the dominance of the liberal option at the regulatory level. Control has been regained over Telewizja Polska (Polish Television), Polska Agencja Prasowa (Polish Press Agency) and, to a lesser extent, Polskie Radio (Polish Radio). We regret to say that there has

been little change on the radio, and it quickly reverted to its previous format.

Jolanta Hajdasz

We have not been able to invite anyone to this conference today from the former presidents of Polskie Radio

Jacek Kurski

There was a certain dominance and emotional involvement of a certain regulatory authority who dominated. On the one hand, he was a regulatory authority, and on the other, he was effectively managing it. It always ends badly when you are both the creator and the material. Polish Radio was in no way reclaimed for the option of the Polish *raison d'état*. To conclude, when we return, it is important to learn from the mandate that regulation gives. Regulation is the key to rectifying the situation. Of course, public-private partnerships and a kind of capital intensification must be configured in such a way that the Polish option also has a share in those portals and radios from which it has so far failed to make a dent on a horizontal and relevant level. The reason was obvious negligence on the part of our camp. In short, we've got loads to do. The most important thing is to save this political machine, the electoral machine, in order to return to power and to rally all forces around the defence of democracy. The choice of the people, which I am convinced will be an unequivocal indication of the United Right, must be respected and mean a real return to power for the United Right option.

Michał Adamczyk

What can we do at the moment? Gather information about what is happening in companies, what is happening in the illegally taken over Telewizja Polska, what is happening in the Polish Press Agency, what is happening in Polish radio stations. Perhaps some of us still have some informants there. I'm doing that as I go along, I already have some documents. This will certainly be a benefit for the future. Submit applications to the public prosecutor's office where possible – if we see a clear breach of the law. With probability bordering on certainty, we can say that Adam Bodnar's prosecutor's office will discontinue the cases, but this does not mean that they cannot be revisited in the future. It will be possible to submit such an application. It is also necessary to keep an eye on court cases. I participate in many, we lose many. In such cases, all legal options, appeals, and complaints should be made use of. This is also something that can be revisited later. During journalistic programmes, during talks, during conferences, inform, widely inform and remind about the illegal actions of this government, with a special focus on the illegally taken over public media. This is also an appeal to journalists and politicians invited to mainstream stations, which today constitute a media umbrella protecting the current government. We should build media and media centres at various levels. Internet channels have been created. I see Krzysztof Ziemięć here and the

internet channel 'Otwarta konserwa' ('Open Tin'). I see Anita Gargas, who made an interesting film. There is also a film by Marcin Tulicki about the behind-the-scenes takeover of the media, not just the media, the institutions of the state, including the national prosecutor's office.

Jolanta Hajdasz

All these links are on our website and will be published shortly.

Michał Adamczyk

We need to show and explain. When the time is right, make them pay. We have to be ready for it. We need to gather information. To conclude, a very interesting topic was raised by Jacek Kurski when he spoke about Nielsen, the monopolist that surveys the media market. Perhaps not all of you realise what a powerful weapon Nielsen possesses. These viewership figures are the only indicators that advertisers use. 1% of the audience in the commercial group, i.e. the 16–59 group, translates roughly into PLN 56 million in revenue per year. You have to take away brokers from that. We are talking about television, and Nielsen has about 3,000 receivers. 1%, that is in the region of 30 receivers. If someone externally influences here – I am not saying they do, but if they did – they have a powerful weapon at their disposal in the market. They know who has a telemeter at home. Just imagine again: 1%, 56 million per year, 1% is decided by about 30 receivers.

Wojciech Surmacz

Before answering the question of whether this must remain the case, I will refer to the reasons behind it and an interesting meeting at the National Broadcasting Council. At the point when there were some voices to maybe say a little bit about the mistakes made in the past and the reasons for what happened, there was such a murmuring: 'No, not now,' etc. I think it's worth saying a few harsh words straight to our faces so that we don't make the same mistakes in the future. I am full of admiration and respect for Jacek Kurski, who came here, is sitting here and talking to us. He fell victim to his own plot, having been president for almost seven years.

Wojciech Surmacz

I grew up on a certain 'pathological' housing estate. Some of my friends are dead, some are in prison. They always said they were going to do something stupid (*dziesiona*). It meant a robbery with a beating. I think that's what they did in the public media a year ago. For seven years, Jacek Kurski kept telling them that it was thanks to them that the Law and Justice party was winning elections. I think they believed it, perhaps it is even true. What they did a year ago can be seen as an act of revenge. It's as if we were paying a bill issued to Telewizja Polska. Returning to the matter at hand, two mistakes were made in the case of Jacek Kurski: the first was that he was hired as president, and the second, even more

significant, was that he was removed from this position at the most crucial moment. There were seven campaigns and all were won. At the moment when he was removed, the campaign was won, but lost. I believe that if he were the president, firstly, the elections would have been won decisively, and secondly, his appearance on television would have been completely different. Jacek Kurski was highly respected everywhere he went. This reminded me of an anecdote: 'Jacek Kurski was asked a question: why do allow such »trash« on this Telewizja Polska? Jacek Kurski's reply was: Do you think I just sit at my desk and press either »trash« or »non-trash« button? That's not what I do in my job.' My point is that there was no understanding of the media at all. Now, as for the future, I think that if the Civic Platform doesn't do it, then the next ones, whether it's PiS or some other ruling party, should finish off the public media.

Jolanta Hajdasz

No restoration?

Wojciech Surmacz

No, get rid of and start anew. Netanyahu did this in Israel, and it worked perfectly. That's for one thing. Another thing concerns private and commercial media. We have all been put to the test. We were talking about the beggar-thy-neighbour thing, which it really isn't. I wrote my master's thesis on begging – something that is given for nothing. We do the actual work. This can

therefore be seen as a form of payment for our work, which we should not be ashamed of. I have the impression that for many years now, these 'conservative' media have had one fundamental problem that hiccups every time. We – and I must say this, take responsibility and admit our shortcomings – have a significant problem with media management and generating commercial revenue. We have to learn it. Over there, they have it easier because they have been doing it for almost 50 years, and we, de facto, a little shorter.

Jacek Kurski

Thank you for the compliments, Wojtek, even though they took a winding path. It is important that Wojtek's intentions are not misinterpreted. It's not as if the TV station will now be accused of being political because it won the election. It wasn't like that. Over the

we simply defied physics. At a time of exodus from linear television, Telewizja Polska has managed to raise viewing figures in absolute numbers since 2018. Taking into account those who switched to streaming platforms, it turned out that in relative terms, the number of viewers of Telewizja Polska on its main channels has grown during our time. We have nothing to be ashamed of. As such, the election wins were due to the fact that television managed to break a certain paradigm of over-elitism, while respecting high culture. Among other events, there were Chopin concerts on Jedyńka and New Year's Eve at the philharmonic hall. Specific funding was allocated to TVP Nauka, TVP Kultura and TVP Historia. The whole story that they were airing 'trash TV' is nonsense. As well as elitising, it was to turn television to a mass audience, to open up a lively, engaging offer, to which a connected communi-

The 2015 elections, if only one electoral data point is taken into account, it is clear what decided the outcome. As you remember, in 2019, turnout was 61%, and in 2015, turnout was 75% of the absolute number of voters. But in 2019, young people who did not vote for the United Right had a turnout of 46%...

years, and this has infuriated the liberal and left-wing option the most, we have denied that the right-wing cannot do television. It's them, they don't know how to create television. We raised television to such viewing levels, to the development of such formats, to such momentum in entertainment, sports, news and live broadcasts that

cation, identity, information and journalistic message effectively mobilised this conservative camp, the patriotic camp. The 2015 elections, if only one electoral data point is taken into account, it is clear what decided the outcome. As you remember, in 2019, turnout was 61%, and in 2015, turnout was 75% of the absolute number of voters.

But in 2019, young people who did not vote for the United Right had a turnout of 46%, which was 15 percentage points lower overall, while the 60+ group, the most loyal viewers of Telewizja Polska and the most loyal voters of the United Right, went to the polls in 2019 at 66%, which is 5 percentage points more than the average. And what happened in 2023? There was a complete reversal. That is, youth turnout jumped from 46% to 71%, an increase of 25 percentage points, and that wiped us out. On the other hand, the most faithful and loyal viewers of Telewizja Polska had the same data, i.e. the audience share remained unchanged. In short, if there had been the kind of extrapolation and mobilisation of Telewizja Polska viewers in 2023 that would have resulted

from an overall increase in turnout, a million more Law and Justice voters would have gone to the polls. For some reason they didn't go. This is where the dog is buried if we are talking about any link between mobilisation and TV quality and performance.

Let's not lose heart, and one last sentence to conclude. I would like to express my sincere thanks to everyone at Telewizja Polska. To journalists, presenters, publishers, production crew, make-up artists and everyone else who made this programme possible, for allowing us to create television that was truly the pride of our camp and lifted it up over the past few years. I think we will return soon, even sooner than some people think, to Telewizja Polska, and we will rebuild it. ■





Panel II

About us, without us.
Journalists on the 'closure'
of public media

SPEAKERS:
KRZYSZTOF SKOWROŃSKI, ADRIAN BORECKI,
ANITA GARGAS, ANNA POPEK, ŁUKASZ BRODZIK,
MAREK PONIEDZIAŁEK, MICHAŁ JASZEWSKI,
MICHAŁ KARNOWSKI, TOMASZ SAKIEWICZ,
MICHAŁ RACHOŃ



INTRODUCTION

KRZYSZTOF SKOWROŃSKI

FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT OF RADIO
WNET, PRESIDENT OF POLISH ASSOCIATION
OF JOURNALISTS (SDP) IN 2011-2024



Thank you very much for entrusting me with the second panel discussion, in which journalists will talk about the liquidation of public media. I welcome Anita Gargas, a journalist from public television, and now on the YouTube channel "Magazyn Anity Gargas". I welcome Ania Popek, a journalist from public television, and now Telewizja Republika. I welcome Adrian Borecki, a journalist from TVP Info, a direct witness to the signal being switched off on December 19. I must justify Marcin Tulicki, who will be represented by Michał Karnowski, who will of course have his point of view. Michał Rachoń will also join us soon.

This is the reality of our work as journalists. Tomasz Sakiewicz, who is still in court, will also participate in this panel. Today is the finale of his trial with Prime Minister Donald Tusk, concerning the lawsuit over the famous cover of "Gott mit uns" from "Gazeta Polska".

Krzysztof Ziemięć is present and absent among us at the same time. An easy-to-solve riddle: Krzysztof Ziemięć was supposed to participate in the panel, sit next to Adrian Borecki, and remain silent. After leaving public television, he was banned from speaking about public media. Obviously, he

would not want to break this ban, because it would have serious consequences for him. So he is with us and at the same time he is not. I will also add that Krzysztof Ziemięć does not represent only himself in this way, because there are really many people like him – especially in regional media. When they agreed to the agreement of the parties, to leave their jobs, they received a so-called "proposal they could not refuse". They had to sign an agreement that for a long time – some two, some three years – they would not speak about public media and their former employer. This is a very unfair, censorship move that we must not forget about. Krzysztof Ziemięć during our conference, who is, and as if he were not, becomes a symbol of all these people.

I also welcome representatives of regional media. Łukasz Brodzik and Marek Poniedziałek from Radio Zachód are among us.

I would like to remind you, in the context of our conference, that as the Association of Polish Journalists,

we have talked many times with European journalists who came here to confirm that there is no freedom of speech in Poland, because public television is at the disposal of Law and Justice. We showed them what the media market looks like in Poland, what the position of TVN and Polsat is, and about radio stations. We showed them weeklies that are published in Poland from the "very right" to the "very left". We were never given credit, because in

all the communiqués that came from the European Federation of Journalists, it was noted that there is no freedom of speech in Poland or that it is threatened. Each time the ranking of freedom of speech was presented, Poland fell to a lower position, against which Jolanta Hajdasz, as the director of the Press Freedom Monitoring Centre, protested many times. This is how the situation looked. Let the journalists tell us how it has changed. ■



Krzysztof Ziemięć – journalist and presenter of main news programs on TVP S.A. from 2004 to December 2023

BRUTAL TAKEOVER

ADRIAN BORECKI

JOURNALIST, UNTIL 2023 TVP REPORTER,
CURRENTLY JOURNALIST OF TELEWIZJA REPUBLIKA



11:18 a.m. This is when TVP Info was taken off the air on the Internet stream and, of course, on television. There was a great chaos. Everyone checked to see if it was a technical error. Five or six minutes later, we already knew what was going on at Woronicza Street. Photos and footage were flooding in. We knew it had already started. We had actually been expecting the takeover of public media since November. The only question was how it would be done. We knew that Donald Tusk and his government would be capable of anything; he had said so himself. He said he wouldn't need 24 hours and would do it lawfully, based on his understanding of the law. And since he doesn't have much in common with the law, we can see that now.

After 11:18 a.m., we realised what was happening. There was a lot of confusion, heated discussions, and ideas on how to restore the signal. However, we did not know exactly what to expect from the authorities. No one was able to tell us what stage we were at, whether it was not a series of mistakes that the television authorities of the time had made. At 12 noon, the News was scheduled. I had the pleasure and honour of presenting the news at 8:00 a.m., 12:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. when I worked at TVP. We knew it was a live broadcast, of course. On that day, we got ready to go on air. One of the female presenters was the host at the time. I was supposed to

report from outside the building on what was happening. We noticed immediately that something wasn't right because when noon struck, the footage wasn't broadcast. There was simply just a TVP1 board. Since I was doing the side news, I knew that Agrobiznes was being broadcast live in the news studio, in the second part of the studio, on the green box. I ran upstairs, and the programme was on. We wondered how to take over television and broadcast the truth, to tell the Poles what is happening, why there is no 12 o'clock news, why there is no TVP Info. We learnt about the fact that there had been a change and that we were to listen to other people via email. It was sent a day later. I myself also received this information via my work email address, stating that I was dismissed from my duties, but only at 7:41 p.m.

Going back to this attempt to broadcast *Agrobiznes*. I think you could hear from my breathlessness that it was a very dynamic action. I ran into the studio, informed the people there of the difficulties. A phone call was made, information was relayed by the production manager. We got permission to interrupt

Agrobiznes and broadcast a special edition of the news. It was a spontaneous reaction. I spoke from the heart, saying what my mind told me I should say to

not take over Telewizja Polska in December, I would withdraw my notice. It was a gentleman's agreement. I knew that I would not want to cooperate with

There was enthusiasm and there was satisfaction that they had succeeded in obstructing this despicable plan, this violation of the law. We managed to show how barbarically and unlawfully they were taking over another Polish state institution.

the Polish people. After my words, the signal was switched off. Then Olimpia Tryzna, the side news editor, ran in and said that they had already taken us down, that we were gone.

There was enthusiasm and there was satisfaction that they had succeeded in obstructing this despicable plan, this violation of the law. We managed to show how barbarically and unlawfully they were taking over another Polish state institution. There was satisfaction that they hadn't planned for someone to think about how to interrupt the broadcast, how to interrupt what seemed like a normal day for viewers. Viewers found out what happened, who was behind it, and what methods were used. The topic of services also came up, which I consider important. These, as far as the public media are concerned, are very much in flux and continue to have a huge impact. All the more so because Lieutenant-Colonel Sienkiewicz, is also a person associated with the services.

Krzysztof Skowroński: At 7:41 p.m., you get fired from your job. How long do you stay at TVP?

Adrian Borecki: I handed in my notice on 7th December because I knew they would come, but I had agreed with President Matyszkowicz that if they did

the PO government because I know what they are capable of. I know what kind of people they are, in my opinion, acting completely against the interests of our country, and I think that my opinion is confirmed by the actions of this government over the last year.

Krzysztof Skowroński: As it was already known that television had been taken over by force, it was already known that some people would remain inside the television station to defend it, that members of the Law and Justice party and various journalists from outside would arrive, so are you staying or are you leaving?

Adrian Borecki: I was inside until 8 p.m., then I went back. With all due respect, I believe that the whole action by Law and Justice MPs, in defence of Powstańców Warszawy Square, was too late. The takeover had already taken place. It was a mistake made not by the MPs but by the current TV authorities that they allowed this to happen and that was that. All those Law and Justice MPs and TVP officials sitting in Powstańców Square... I think it was pointless, because it was already impossible to restore the signal, and that was the most important thing. I believe that just sitting and occupying this building did not make any sense at all. ■

IT WAS A PREMEDITATED ACT

ANITA GARGAS

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST, FROM 2016 TO DECEMBER 2023 SHE HOSTED "INVESTIGATIVE MAGAZINE" BY ANITA GARGAS ON TVP1, SINCE JANUARY 2024 SHE HAS BEEN HOSTING "MAGAZYN ANITY GARGAS" ON YOUTUBE



It all started the day before, on 19 December, when the Sejm passed a resolution that obliged state authorities to take unspecified measures at the behest of the Ministry of Culture, which were supposed to bring order to the public media and the Polish Press Agency. We were at TVP on Woronicza Street on 19 December. It was there that the first meetings of MPs and senators began, who intervened in defence of public media. We spent the entire night with those intervening on Woronicza. And in fact, the critical events that led to Woronicza being taken over in a hostile manner obviously took place on the 20th December.

I agree with the opinion that public media were collateral damage in some political games played by the Coalition, which came to power on 13th December. By the way, anyone who back then called the coalition that took power on 13th December the '13th December Coalition' had some pretty prophetic skills. I don't think they realised how prophetic that would be. None of us could have imagined that there would be so many similarities between what happened after 13th December 2023 and what happened after 13th

December 1981. Someone said that the media might have fallen victim to the political games played by the 13th December. I strongly disagree with that. I just would like to say that it was the public media that served as a tool for implementing this political plan. A tool for a plan that wasn't written in Warsaw, after all. The public media was a tool to carry out a plan that was written somewhere outside Poland. In Berlin? In Brussels? A tool to close a certain system that would allow this plan to be realised. The public media were the only ones to fulfil their information mission 100%. This information was clearly a source of irritation for the Coalition led by Donald Tusk. The other mainstream media censored information, especially on issues crucial to Poland's existence, to Poland's statehood, to our identity. The public media fulfilled this duty to inform and stood guard over the values that some wanted to forget. They stood guard over our national identity and protected our national and cultural heritage. Everything that is associated with Poland.

If we are now talking about the media and why we defended them – it was because we were standing up for those values. Not because they were associated with one party or another, but because they represented such values. The fact that a particular party had a similar or even identical value sys-

is a remnant of Anita Gargas' *Investigative Magazine* (*Magazyn śledczy Anity Gargas*) which you had the opportunity to watch on TVP1 and which, of course, was not right immediately after the 13th December Coalition came to power. I would like to remind you, because it is worth emphasising, that *Magazyn*

The public media fulfilled this duty to inform and stood guard over the values that some wanted to forget. They stood guard over our national identity and protected our national and cultural heritage. Everything that is associated with Poland. If we are now talking about the media and why we defended them – it was because we were standing up for those values.

tem should concern us as Poles. Our aim was to defend these shared values and the public media was the transmission belt to spread and communicate them to the public, to the general public. The events of the night of 19th to 20th December should be the subject of another extensive film, or even a series, concerning the preparations for this operation at the notary's office, if indeed they took place. It was obvious that journalists would defend television and would record it. I am glad that our team was in all possible places that were the arena of the 13th December Coalition's activities, that our journalists were on Woronicza, at Powstańców Square, and at the Polish Press Agency, and that they were lucky enough to record everything that was happening there. One film has already been made, followed by a second film that will soon premiere. Our film, directed by Mateusz Teska and myself, entitled *Stan likwidacji* (*State of Liquidation*), can be viewed on YouTube. It was made by a team that

śledczy aired nearly 300 episodes, and those episodes disappeared in one fell swoop, with a single click. Our work spanning over seven years has been removed from the TVP VOD platform, like many other programmes. It is very important to remember that it is not just that we recorded certain important events, that we kept an eye on the authorities, and that this was done from the right, the left, the top, the bottom, contrary to what some people wanted us to believe. We defended values or areas that had been neglected because public life was moving so fast, political life was moving so fast, that they were forgotten. Our natural heritage, our cultural heritage, even ecology, this was present on air in the programmes of Anita Gargas' *Investigative Magazine*. I think that eco-activists, pseudo-eco-activists and patho-eco-activists should be ashamed of our achievements, of the numerous places where we have intervened, often successfully, and the many issues we have addressed.

As for liquidation, no one communicated with me. The programme was simply taken off air. What's more, two more episodes that were prepared have been 'shelved', meaning they are lying on a shelf waiting for mercy. One episode covered corruption in the European Parliament. Very interesting, with comments from people abroad as well. Also, a programme about the rubbish that is flooding us. Rubbish imported from the west, including Germany, illegally of course. We identified the landfills and described everything, so the programme disappeared. Our team was, of course, present at all these locations. One thing can be said with certainty: This action we observed was not spontaneous. It was a planned operation, a special operation involving special measures, special forces, security guards and an unprecedented number of police officers, who stormed public media facilities. It was a special operation involving special service officers, and for good reason: it was endorsed by Lieutenant Colonel Sienkiewicz, Minister of Special Services. All of this leads us to look at the whole event as preparing a certain foreground. That is, the 13th December Coalition had to ensure that the partial media umbrella it had was extended to cover the entire media sphere and public space. On top of that, the ground had not been cleared for further action, because the next steps were the prosecutor's office, the National Council of the Judiciary, etc. To achieve this, it was necessary to take control of the public media.

We can imagine what media coverage would look like today if public

television had remained. In the same frames, the same journalists would have reported on the great successes of Donald Tusk's government. No doubt they now have room for manoeuvre, but note that this would merely be an attempt to balance the imbalance in the sphere of mainstream media. Public television did not balance all mainstream media, it was in minority. If we are talking about the message we were dealing with during the last years of the Law and Justice or United Right governments, it was merely a catch-up or an attempt to counteract the fake news coming from the other side. Balance was still out of the question. Barely, it was an attempt to balance the news coverage at the time.

Krzysztof Skowroński: This is true. And we, as the Association of Polish Journalists, have repeatedly spoken with European journalists who came here to confirm that there is no freedom of speech in Poland because public television is at the beck and call of Law and Justice. We showed them what the media market looks like in Poland, what TVN's position is, what Polsat's position is, what the situation is with regard to radio stations, and we showed them weekly magazines published in Poland, ranging from the far right to the far left. They never admitted we were right because, of course, in all the communications that came from the European Federation of Journalists, it was pointed out that there was no freedom of speech in Poland, freedom of speech was under threat. One more thing: every time there have been these ratings about freedom of speech,



Poland has fallen to a lower and lower position, which Jolanta Hajdasz, as director of the Press Freedom Monitoring Centre, has protested against many times. That was the situation.

Anita Gargas: Please also consider what is happening now when we talk about freedom of speech and journalists, and whether they can properly fulfil their duties. Over the past year, for example, our colleague who currently works at Anita Gargas' magazine – because I didn't mention it earlier, but let me digress here – *Magazyn Śledczy* no longer exists, but there is *Magazyn Anity Gargas* (Anita Gargas' Magazine) on YouTube. I highly recommend to you the material we broadcast there. These are both studio interviews and reports, features. An editorial colleague of ours was convicted in a criminal trial at first instance for asking questions with the help of a press officer in the case of a judge who was no longer practising her profession, she was a former judge and worked in a certain institution. We cannot mention now, unfortunately, because of this trial, either the

institution or the name of the former judge, but nevertheless, to ask a question about anyone, but even more so about a judge who should be a crystal-line figure. Asking a question cannot result in punishing a journalist who is trying to get to the truth precisely by asking questions. And with the help of an ombudsman. I would like to express my thanks here, because the Polish Journalists' Association and the Press Freedom Monitoring Centre rose to the challenge and helped us to publicise the case and obtain funds for the appeal. It cannot be the case that journalists are punished for asking questions. And now it is happening because there is public acquiescence in the sense that the public does not know about it because they are cut off from this kind of information. Consequently, there is no social pressure on those who commit this. There is no social pressure to nip such situations in the bud. For all intents and purposes, this lawsuit that befell our colleague, a private indictment, should have been dismissed outright by the judge as unfounded. ■

YOU HAVE NO RIGHT TO DEFEND YOURSELF

ANNA POPEK

JOURNALIST AND PRESENTER OF TELEWIZJA POLSKA UNTIL 2023, CURRENTLY TELEWIZJA REPUBLIKA, MEMBER OF THE MAIN BOARD OF POLISH ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS (SDP)



The scenes that Adrian and Anita talked about are straight out of an action movie. If we wanted to make one, we would have filmed scenes like that. I am surprised that nothing happened to the authors of this takeover or to the principals for a year. Why are we all pretending that this was supposed to happen? In my opinion, the answer is: it was prepared much earlier, for 8 years, when the United Right was in power. Public television journalists, including me personally, were called propagandists hundreds, thousands of times. We were not recognized as journalists, only because of our place of work. We were stigmatized as unprofessional and serving the party.

I have been doing this job for over 25 years. The authorities of Polish Television were different, and only during that period I was called that way. It was degrading, vulgar and as if it took away our human dignity. The mechanism is very simple, when you want to exclude a group from public circulation, you give it such a role. It has been used in history before, it ended cruelly, also in concentration camps. There were also moments when we were ordered to wear an armband on our hand, informing us that we are from

public television. Of course, part of it was trolls and people who were somehow involved in propaganda from the other side. On the other hand, such an averagely informed viewer, he does not know who is a propagandist, who is a journalist and whether he is doing his job well. He simply joins the wave that is flowing. The wave full of hatred and strongly carrying did not provoke a defensive reaction. Of course, there were groups of people and we thank you very much for standing up for us and protesting in this cold, but it was not enough, it was not a mass movement. Because on a mass scale, I only saw and read satisfaction on social media: „Oh, good for them.”, „Okay, let it be so.” It was an induced, apparently artificially enhanced satisfaction, but many times I received messages, even phone calls, when someone managed to find my phone number. Then I heard: „That's a very good thing, now you're going to sit in prison. Now you're going to pay for everything you did.” They attributed all the faults of a political party, imagined or not, to us, journalists, a priori,

even though I was never a member of such a party. It was preparing the ground. It started much earlier and lasted a few years. „You have no right to defend yourself, because you're a scumbag, you're a PiS propagandist,” etc. People were stripped of their dignity, like games. I think that the Christians dragged in the Coliseum before that

you now, but no, they definitely won't touch you journalists, the breakfast buffet or cultural programs.” I knew something, I suspected that this would happen, although we didn't think that the takeover of the media would be carried out in such a literal way by force. However, regardless of what programs were made, what was said in them, what

I think that the Christians dragged in the Coliseum before that crowd could have felt the same way. They were simply meat to be entertained with, to watch, and then eat popcorn and go.

crowd could have felt the same way. They were simply meat to be entertained with, to watch, and then eat popcorn and go. And I think that we were brought to this point by preparing an appropriate opinion about us, journalists working in public television, regardless of what we did. When these movements started after the elections, people said: „Oh, maybe things will change for

worldview was represented – because if someone wanted to trace the worldview of people or simply their lifestyle – they would notice that it didn't change much over the years, that there was more or less a certain constant rate. At some point, however, this constant rate began to bother. There was no response from people and I guess there still isn't. We were thrown to the wolves. ■



Anna Popiek, Michał Karnowski

WE WERE STIGMATISED

ŁUKASZ BRODZIK

DEPUTY EDITOR-IN-CHIEF OF RADIO ZACHÓD UNTIL DECEMBER 2023, DISMISSED BY THE LIQUIDATOR IN JANUARY 2024



Łukasz Brodzik: I am the deputy editor-in-chief of Radio Zachód. I believe that I can still consider myself as such, because on 21 August 2024, the District Court in Zielona Góra ordered that my claim for reinstatement be secured by ordering the defendant, i.e. Polskie Radio Zachód, a regional radio station in Zielona Góra, to continue employing me until the proceedings are legally concluded. I would like to begin by talking about the successes in the fight against liquidators and liquidation. We managed to obtain this at our regional radio station. To a certain extent, the events described here also took place at Radio Zachód. There were broadcast shutdowns, our journalists were silenced and dismissed, and protests outside the radio station attracted hundreds of people. The zachod24.co.uk portal with all content, footage was also taken down. I think it is worth starting with the fact that we have a tangible success story when it comes to fighting decommissioning, and that success story is called Marek Poniedziałek. By court order, just like me and Daniel Sawicki, he was reinstated to his job and signed a contract with the radio station. As far as I know, he is probably the only journalist in

Poland working for public media who works for a regional radio station.

Several journalists have been laid off at Radio Zachód: Marek Poniedziałek, Adam Ruszczyński, Daniel Sawicki and me. Janusz Życzkowski's and Krzysztof Chmielik's contracts were not extended. These were civil law contracts, but Janusz Młyński, in solidarity with the dismissed journalists, said goodbye to his listeners on air and resigned from his job after 30 years of working for Radio Zachód on his own initiative. Of course, we have filed lawsuits in the Labour Court. I would only add that Marek Poniedziałek, Daniel Sawicki and I were protected trade unionists. At Radio Zachód, we have the 'Solidarity' Trade Union, 'Solidarity 80', and two other employee unions. We successfully submitted an application. Since last year, from 2023 onwards, there has been such an opportunity thanks precisely to Solidarity to secure workers for the duration of the process so that they have a livelihood. If the court finds that the claim is likely to be upheld, it may order the

MAREK PONIEDZIAŁEK

JOURNALIST OF RADIO ZACHÓD, DISMISSED BY THE LIQUIDATOR IN JANUARY 2024.



continued employment of the protected trade union members for that period, which was successful in my case and in the cases of Marek Poniedziałek and Daniel Sawicki. I was laid off on 26th January, and the three colleagues I mentioned were also given notice. The first reason given in the notice of termination was the liquidation of the company. The second one, which was given in my case, was the improper performance of the entrusted employee duties. An analysis of the content of the radio programmes I conducted, in particular journalistic programmes, did not indicate that the standards of pluralism, impartiality, balance and independence were upheld. On the contrary, the analysis proved that I deliberately violated the above-mentioned principles. More details are not available, so I do not know which broadcasts out of the thousands carried out were affected. This was also the subject of our lawsuit, as the allegations were very vague. Of course, I asked the liquidator directly, I was the first person to be fired at the radio station, about who was judging my broadcasts. The liquidator came to the radio station. I saw him on 25th January, and the day after that he had already handed me my notice first thing in the morning, so he had a moment to analyse my content. He replied that we would settle this in court. I asked him a second question, inviting him to indicate which of these

programmes he did not like. He said again: 'We'll see you in court.' As I have already mentioned, this meeting took place. The District Court granted us all an order dismissing the application for security, deeming it unfounded. We were curious to know if the court would consider the liquidation, if it would refer to it. And of course, it did. They used a very interesting argument to support it: The liquidation of the employer's company – this is part of a three-part justification – is a valid reason for terminating an employment contract concluded with an employee of that company. The liquidation was recorded in the register with the relevant date. The data entered in the register are presumed to be true, which I, as the claimant, have been unable to refute. The entry about the person of the liquidator also benefits from such a presumption, because after all, someone had to sign the notice of termination. However, according to publicly available information, Michał Iwanowski was appointed as liquidator on 23rd January and signed the employer's statement

on 26th January. Therefore, in this respect, the presumption of the accuracy of the entry has been rebutted and it should be assumed at this stage of the proceedings that Michał Iwanowski was the person authorised to represent the company on the above-mentioned date. This specific fact will be proven later in the trial. So a liquidation is a liq-

When I used to come to work, I would say to my colleagues: let's collect money for lawyers, because they won't let us off the hook. With the experience of Donald Tusk's previous governments, it was expected that there would be an attempt to get rid of us.

uidation because it is in the KRS, even though the liquidator is not listed in the KRS. However, he could have dismissed someone, because the national media reported him to be a liquidator. Marek Poniedziałek was the first to appeal to the District Court against this order and won that security was granted to him.

Jolanta Hajdasz: The SDP Press Freedom Monitoring Centre monitors all these processes, including those in the Labour Court. If any journalists wish to do so, and have arguments to support their case, they are welcome to contact us. We will support and monitor these processes and speak out publicly. In the cases mentioned by Łukasz, the Press Freedom Monitoring Center sent an *amicus curiae* opinion. A summary is available to read on our website. This document is public. We must not allow journalists to be treated in this way, i.e. on the basis of fabricated legal grounds, which generally involve placing public media in liquidation contrary to applicable laws.

Łukasz Brodzik: I would like to thank the Monitoring Centre for their support. Perhaps there will be an opportunity to talk about how to deal with it, how to fight it, or how to defend yourself against it. When I used to come to work, I would say to my colleagues: let's collect money for lawyers, because they won't let us off the hook.

With the experience of Donald Tusk's previous governments, it was expected that there would be an attempt to get rid of us. The same judge – who initially refused to grant us security, then probably after receiving the *amicus curiae* brief – wrote that she would grant it after all and that there was a possibility of an apparent cause for termination of the employment contract, i.e. liquidation, resulting from the failure to perform the actions referred to, *inter alia*, in the Commercial Companies Code. It appears that the judges, especially those in the Labour Court, are sympathetic to this appearance of liquidation.

Marek Poniedziałek: To add to what Łukasz said: indeed, I am the only one who has been successfully reinstated to work so far. However, I must clarify what I mean by 'successfully'. I was deprived of my on-air job. Now, I work from home. I have certain tasks, but I'm not able to influence the work of the editorial team in any way. It is also worth mentioning who

was appointed as the liquidator of Radio Zachód in the Lubusz Voivodeship and who currently serves as the liquidator and editor-in-chief. This is Michał Iwanowski, who for many years worked at the Marshal's Office of the Lubusz Voivodeship, previously as the spokesperson for Marshal Elżbieta Anna Polak or for the board of the Lubusz Voivodeship. Then as director in the Marshal's office governed by the PO and PSL coalition. An active political activist with media experience, but an active political activist who has set himself the goal of restoring pluralism in public media at Radio Zachód. The restoration of pluralism began with journalists who could be associated with the conservative side being deprived of the opportunity to work in the editorial office. I would like to refer to what Mrs Anna Popek said about the experiences of people working in public media. We were heavily stigmatised, even in western Poland. The Lubusz Voivodeship is a kind of stronghold for the ruling party, the main party in the coalition. I remember a story back in 2018. In fact, I was the one who caused this commotion, so to speak. I posted the results of a poll conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre on our radio station's Facebook page. Without any commentary, a result that was not very favourable to the opposition at the time. One of the councillors of the Lubusz Voivodeship, a member of the Civic Coalition, directly threatened

us at the time that after winning the elections, we would have to look for a place not only for another job, but also outside the Lubusz Voivodeship, in the Bieszczady Mountains. All these opinions, expressed by public figures who are particularly responsible for their words, induced a kind of hatred towards all public media employees, regardless of whether they could be attributed any political connotations or not. There's been a few comments here that what happened in the public media is impossible to fix or undo. I dare to disagree with this. Why? Of course, leaving aside the issues raised by President Jacek Kurski and other speakers, who said that certain decisions are being made that may encourage the withdrawal of funds from public television and radio, and leaving aside the fact that in 2015 the media market was also somehow structured, and yet the management of Telewizja Polska and public radio managed to establish a certain position, I think that one day, when this sad time of lawlessness in Poland comes to an end, we will once again face the challenge of building public media. As this is a political decision, I am reassured that the public media will exist. I believe that we, as journalists, should ensure that public media are as free as possible from the influence and control of those currently in power. I know it's not easy, but it's crucial to regain trust, listenership and viewership. ■

THE NARRATIVE CREATED IS INTENDED TO IMPRESS THE COURTROOM

MICHAŁ JASZEWSKI

LEGAL ADVISOR OF POLISH ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS (SDP)



Ladies and Gentlemen, I have prepared three *amicus curiae* legal opinions, which were submitted in the cases of editor Brodzik, editor Poniedziałek and also editor Daniel Sawicki from Radio Zachód in Zielona Góra. When translating freedom of speech into labour law, it is important to pay attention to how the authorities destroy this freedom of speech by transferring it to employment relations. First, they say it's being shut down, then it turns out that only four employees are being laid off. And these are exactly the ones you don't like and

are statements that are exceptionally broad and lacking in specificity. What for? This was so that, in response to the lawsuit, they could freely choose their arguments, some of which, I must admit, were completely bizarre. For example, the allegation was that one of the plaintiffs – the aforementioned gentlemen appealed, so they are plaintiffs in this case – spoke disrespectfully about the European Union. So I understand that he should have done what

How the authorities destroy freedom of speech by transferring it to employment relations? First, they say it's being shut down, then it turns out that only four employees are being laid off. And these are exactly the ones you don't like and have some dispute with.

have some dispute with. That's for one thing. Secondly, this is basic knowledge in the field of labour law. Even during law studies, students learn what termination of an employment contract is and what it should contain. The reason for termination must be real and concrete. And now, what should be included in such a document? These

most of our legal elite do. They basically stomp their feet whenever they see a ruling from the CJEU. If you had done that, you might have kept your jobs. For example, emphasising that Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz is a colonel in the special services. We pointed that out. This is hardly groundbreaking, as even Wikipedia mentions it. These are

utterly basic things, and it turns out that this is pointed out in the response to the lawsuit, without any embarrassment, as the reason. The right wording can impress the court. The impression and narrative are important. It is supposed to be a *hagadah* (a fabricated story) – a narrative meant to discredit the employee and suggest they support some regime. In all this, there is not a shred of objectivity to be expected in a public medium. The narrative is constantly being developed and presented: 'That narrative is bad, ours is good.' Analyses of these pleadings indicate this. We hope that the courts

will take this into account in some way. We have emphasised this strongly. We hope that the stance of the Press Freedom Monitoring Centre will carry significant weight in these cases. One can only encourage other journalists not to give up. The point is to stigmatise such absurdities. Really, whether one supports the European Union or not, one has the right to speak about it. It cannot be that freedom of speech is permitted only for one side. If anyone listening to us right now has received such a notice, they can go to court with a clear conscience, because this is a form of censorship. ■



IT'S GOING TO BE CRIME AND PUNISHMENT AFTER ALL

MICHAŁ KARNOWSKI

JOURNALIST, COLUMNIST FOR TELEWIZJA WPOLSCIE24 AND TYGODNIK SIECI, COOPERATED WITH TVP S.A. UNTIL 2023, MEMBER OF THE MAIN BOARD OF POLISH ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS (SDP)



If our defence of Powstańców Square was pointless, why make these films? What did we document? What did Anita Gargas do? What did Marcin Tulicki do? Firstly, in that situation, it was illegal. Remember that this defence forced them to change their classification and legal approach. Secondly, our resistance also became apparent, and older people know – those who may still remember communism and the 1990s and 2000s – that it makes sense, just like pressure. I have great respect for those who spent three weeks there, including the festive season. Everyone could have chosen differently, but it had moral, political, legal and future significance. If they hadn't seen this resistance, they might already be somewhere else. Perhaps they decided that our little editorial offices were easy to break. That's my gut feeling. I have great respect for those who spent those weeks there, including Christmas and New Year's Eve. Let's remember that a great injustice has been done, somehow it doesn't ring a bell, an injustice to viewers, because they have suddenly been deprived of access to information. I remember a phone call from my mum. War? What's going on? Why

no television? Why has the national broadcaster disappeared? A great injustice has been done to journalists, as we have discussed. Harm has been done to Poland as a country that, until now, had been governed by the rule of law. Terrible things were also happening in the field. I am fresh from the National Bank of Poland competition and there we rewarded journalists who had already been sacked, with a wolf ticket. They are persecuted even when they find a job in private business, so let's also maybe think about them rather than talk about them: 'I am the greatest. I have sacrificed myself. I am a star.' I'm sorry, but it was hurtful. Today, we have a situation where, for the first time after 1989, the police carried journalists to the studios. They sit there to this day, stretched out and content. We do remember about it. This conference – for which I thank President Jolanta Hajdasz very much, because I know how much effort it took to organise it – is an important voice saying that we have not forgotten, that it is recorded somewhere, that we remember how they entered those studios. From

this comes an important conclusion: they do not have the authority necessary to be a public television journalist, because they got in there by violence, illegally, to the detriment of other people, including viewers. This complacency is not legitimate, in fact, I don't particularly see it there. That shadow of the police boot going in there, of the secret service operation, as Anita Gargas said, hovers over it all. It is very much there and is not waning at all. This has not been whitewashed over time because they are from an illegitimate bed and this has consequences. That's how I would describe it. Today, we know that this was a prelude to an attack on Polish democracy, Polish freedom and – by extension – Polish independence.. They want

than once the crowd tried to force the door, but there was a chairman who resisted. Today there is a certain punchline to those events. The tough TV leadership, if it had survived, would have been able to defend TV or, in any case, would have been able to defend it for much longer. There were those who somehow, I have a feeling, deeply misunderstood this. A big thank you to President Jacek Kurski, because it was thanks to him that the space of freedom existed. Many journalists have grown there. Those who maybe don't remember the 1990s and 2000s don't appreciate today what it means to have a few years of development, a big antenna that builds you up, opportunities, possibilities. This was made possible thanks to the presidency

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to take away our freedom in order to sell our independence. Is it going to be crime without punishment? I think It's going to be crime and punishment after all. We need to keep an eye on this. It's not about persecuting someone, tormenting someone, but about making sure that these things, situations are at least named in the future. So that all those who took part in it would have it recorded in their biography what they took part in. There was a lack of leadership during these crucial days. We were right in saying for years that Jacek Kurski, the president, played a significant role. After all, this is not the first time they have tried to force their way into television. More

of Jacek Kurski, so I would like to emphasise this strongly and give it equal recognition. The films we will see, such as Anita Gargas and Marcin Tulicki's *The Takeover* (*Przejęcie*), are important documentation of a significant moment. To reiterate, if we were to accept the thesis that television was not worth defending at the time, then what are these films for and what are they about? What were we really doing there? It was an important moment in Polish history, and everyone who remained in the buildings and on Powstańców Square amid truly high tension earned a place in the history of the defence of Polish journalism and our freedom. ■

FREEDOM OF SPEECH IS UNDER MASSIVE THREAT AND THIS IS PROGRESSING

TOMASZ SAKIEWICZ

PREZES ZARZĄDU TELEWIZJI REPUBLIKA,
REDAKTOR NACZELNY GAZETY POLSKIEJ



On the anniversary of the attack on television, I happened to stand trial with Donald Tusk, who is demanding compensation from Polska Akcja Humanitarna (Polish Humanitarian Action), a demand he made when the head of Polska Akcja Humanitarna attacked Polish soldiers and officers. So I think this is such a *signum temporis*. It is, of course, about one of the satirical covers. Donald Tusk brought three lawsuits against me in a short space of time. I checked which leaders in recent years, state leaders, had brought lawsuits over satirical covers, so there were quite a few announcements, but only three actually went ahead. Recep Erdogan, Alaksandr Łukaszenka and Donald Tusk. There were no others, although there had been many promises, including Macron and Trump. In the end, they did not go to court, as this would have caused an outcry in the press. We know what Łukaszenka's trials are like. Today, on the other hand, we had another new quality and perhaps I will start with that.

Yesterday, Donald Tusk and his government decided that they will evaluate court sentences. Just to remind you, he's a party to my case. I have

asked the Court to clarify the state of the law as it stands, because the judgment may not satisfy Donald Tusk and he will have the right, in accordance with the Government's resolution, to assess it. He will therefore only recognise a sentence against me that satisfies him. I will also ask the Court to ask the Constitutional Court to clarify the state of the law, which also applies at my hearing. Now, returning to the main topic, indeed, I couldn't be dismissed. Apparently, I was one of the most frequent commentators in the public media according to statistics, and it was even calculated that I earned hundreds of thousands of zlotys – this was announced. Please don't take this personally, it was my own decision based on my situation. I decided not to take a penny for my performances because, as the president of a television station, even if it wasn't a very big one at the time, I felt that I shouldn't. It is different to appear as a commentator, as a guest. Anyway, I have never tried to say no to any media. Now I will make an exception for illegal public media,

but if someone even from the other side asks, I comment and never refuse. At one point, TVP began inviting me more often, especially during Jarek Olechowski's time. The situation you have witnessed is, of course, the result of the fact that on 19 December, at a time when authoritarianism was emerging, freedom of speech was the first target. Donald Tusk has a bigger plan. The date he chose for himself, 13th December, is not just subconscious. He could just as easily have formed a government on the evening of 12th December or on the morning of 14th December. He chose that date because it suited him. He also wanted to shock his opponents. He builds a kind of limited authoritarianism. The people he recruits – that is, the main operators, former military intelligence and civilian security service members, or their protégés – are the

took place as early as October. We can't say everything, but I did, in fact, have to buy up the station's capital at a very fast pace, and that's where our stock and resources went, so that we wouldn't simply be taken over. We have a strong suspicion that this was a parallel operation from the camp of the incoming government. It's not that they completely disregarded us or overlooked us. Perhaps one day I will be able to say more about this, but for the safety of various people who were involved in the countermeasures, I cannot say everything. They managed to block that quite successfully, so when they realised that the Republic was taking over TVP Info's audience, that's when the second blow came, which was directly to our resources. There are many more of these strikes, as there has also been a massive attack on a foundation that raises

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ones best suited for this. It is a certain process, a certain operation. The public media fell victim in the first instance. They were the strongest source of alternative information to the liberal-left elite that operated in Poland. They were most strongly supported and, as such, went first. Moments later, the Republic was furiously attacked, as the first attack, such a very serious, visible one that you could see, was two weeks later. It's about a provocation to get us away from money, away from advertising. Actions were parallel as the attack, the first attempt to take over the Republic,

money with an attempt to destroy that foundation. We have managed to defend it for a few months. Of course, in addition to the legal staff, we immediately created a second foundation. Always creating an alternative, i.e. several sources of defence, weakens the will to attack. You need to have a few aces up your sleeve to defend against a stronger opponent. It is also a lesson from TVP. I don't want to discuss now whether protection should be one way or another, or whether it should be reviewed. I thought it needed to be checked a little better and I was sending these signals.

Maciek Świrski sent officially and I sent privately. I quizzed various people about it because I knew what security meant. After my experience of taking over, for example, 'Gazeta Polska', I knew what my own protection meant. This was neglected. Quite apart from the debate about how it was defended, whether it was defended or not, this process of building authoritarianism based on firstly taking over the sphere of freedom of speech was not only supposed to crush the media, but was also supposed to crush the people. I am not criticising either attitude here. That is to say, some came out directly, as it were, in this protest, others tried to put up legal resistance, while a third passed immediately to us like Michał Rachoń, who appeared on Republika TV the next day. Adrian Borecki paid a huge price, as he is one of the few employees to have been dismissed from Telewizja Polska on disciplinary grounds. There is a recorded scene of Adrian being caught

outside the house. It is completely unheard of to dismiss someone from their job on disciplinary grounds simply because they were the first to resist. The first one so historically, because he just went on air and said that television was about to be taken over. This was the last voice of free Poland on TVP, as it was followed by Czysta Woda (Clear Water). First of all, there was a break and nothing was broadcast. The attitudes adopted by the journalists were also appropriate to their life situations, so I do not criticise any of them. I believe that everyone also had the right to take care of themselves a little bit. They didn't have to fail right away. Of course, it is also important to remember that thinking about alternatives is the responsibility of someone who thinks about public affairs. Always. Both politicians and journalists. These alternatives had to be built and we were quietly building them. We didn't boast about it too much, but we were creating a technical



Tomasz Sakiewicz



Maria Giedz, SDP

capacity that was capable of taking over TVP viewers, because that was the most important thing. We didn't have good cameras, we didn't have good studios. Our journalists were poorly paid, but we had that potential, that last line of defence, so that people could just turn on the Republic on 19th December and take over the mission of TVP Info. This has worked out for us regardless of whether we are liked or disliked or treated as competition. Our most important mission we had to carry out was successful.

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that after this year, we are the ones in the spotlight and under the most fire. I'm not even talking about today's trial, which was a bit of a farce. I will have to pay Mrs. Ochojska 100,000. Generally speaking, the number of action we have recorded against is outstanding. It's just that we don't want to talk about everything, so as not to make it a little easier for the opponent. However, the firepower is very powerful.

There is no point in deluding ourselves that they have given up anything. They just aren't always smart and sometimes it works out the other way round for them. When they blocked our adverts, people started to deposit money, and that was perhaps more than was received from those adverts. Since they didn't let us into the conference, people preferred to watch the journalist outside the Chancellery rather than inside, and the viewership grew. When we showed Nawrocki carrying a fridge or a washing machine, they preferred to watch him more than Trzaskowski's big show, because we then outbid TVN24. Poles can choose, and the most important thing is to communicate to the world what has happened. That is to say, to explain that in Poland there was no change of power from one party to another, but rather an attempt to destroy the democratic system. Freedom of speech is under massive threat and this is progressing. ■

THEY ARE QUESTIONING THE POSSIBILITY OF PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS IN POLAND

MICHAŁ RACHOŃ

JOURNALIST AND PUBLICIST, UNTIL DECEMBER 2023
AUTHOR OF PROGRAMS AT TVP S.A., CURRENTLY
PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF TELEWIZJA REPUBLIKA



A lot has been said about how public television was shut down. It's worth explaining how materials and programmes vanished from the archive. At what pace changes in public television archives occurred. I would answer in two ways. Firstly, this is already a reality that I treat as a past reality. It was so long ago that it doesn't really matter today, although it does gain significance in the context of describing what happened and drawing conclusions.

I was informed by Anita Gargas by telephone of what had happened when the signal was switched off. I got in the car immediately, arrived at the square and, in fact, one or two hours later, I got the information that the *Reset* series had been taken off the TVP VOD platform. I made it in time, and I live about an hour or so from Warsaw. I arrived at my office and one of my colleagues, who was still working on the series at the time, informed me about the whole incident. The VOD platform is one of the many spectacular successes of *Telewizja Polska*. Successes that are still

untold, but deserve to be documented someday. Perhaps I shouldn't say this, but it doesn't matter today for two reasons. Firstly, because it was only a prelude to even more serious matters. This is what we are seeing at the moment, for example. Today, we are discussing in Poland the fact that politicians who are in power, largely illegally, the same people who broke into or illegally seized the buildings of *Telewizja Polska*, the Polish Press Agency and *Polskie Radio*, are beginning to question the possibility of holding presidential elections in Poland. They go much further down the road that is obvious. If someone starts by destroying the media, it is clear why they are doing it. All regimes in history have operated in the same way. I don't think it makes much difference, despite the attempt at such Orwellian removal of history. I expected the worst, as I am very familiar with the documents describing their previous governments. I lacked imagination, not even as to their intentions, but as to what possibilities today's digital reality offers. It is difficult for us to imagine

that one day someone will remove from all libraries in Poland all editions of the paper newspapers in which our older colleagues have written over the years. I am still working in paper newspapers, we are constantly publishing them. However, it is difficult to imagine that someone came and removed all editions of, for example, '*Gazeta Wyborcza*', '*Gazeta Polska*' or whatever from all libraries across Poland. The

associated with '*Gazeta Polska*.' I know that the *Special Mission* archives exist, even if they are not available online. I also know that regardless of whether Colonel Rympalek wants to destroy the archives or 17 episodes of the *Reset* series, even if he removed them from the VOD platform, he did not cause the copies to cease to exist. People copy them, pass them on and give them new life, but that is because, in essence, no

If someone starts by destroying the media, it is clear why they are doing it. All regimes in history have operated in the same way.

digital reality we live in gives the opportunity for any Colonel Rympalek who walks into any institution and has control of that institution's digital assets to remove whatever he wants with one click and insert something else in its place with a second click. For example, insert Jarosław Kaczyński into the film instead of Donald Tusk. This should be a kind of memento – for all of us as journalists. Because what Orwell described in 1984 as some ghastly vision has been made possible by today's technologies. What I mean is *Special Mission* (*Misja Specjalna*). This was the first editorial team I worked for. I first worked at Anita Gargas' *Special Mission* and then at the *Niezależna.pl* portal and since then I have been

authoritarian power, whatever it may be, can ever hope to destroy freedom without resorting to reality. This reality actually carries within it a positive element – it cannot be completely enslaved. What has happened and the unprecedented success of the station I am part of, where I started working in 2012/2013, is proof of this. The fact that *Belsat* is being shut down and liquidated is not a separate element of this story. This is the point of the story. This is exactly the point. This is what the media is being destroyed for, and this is what has happened so that the interests of those countries that have been trying to control this part of the world for a long time can continue to be pursued. ■



Panel III

Belsat. Mission for Decommissioning

SPEAKERS:

MARIUSZ PILIS,

AGNIESZKA ROMASZEWSKA-GUZY



BELSAT. MISSION FOR DECOMMISSIONING

MARIUSZ PILIS

DZIENNIKARZ, REŻYSER FILMÓW
DOKUMENTALNYCH, POMYSŁODAWCA I PIERWSZY
DYREKTOR TVP INFO, VICE PREZES SDP

Mariusz Pilis: Belsat TV is a Belarusian TV channel, which operated continuously – as a separate channel, but within the structures of the public TV – since 2007 until recently. I will try to present it by organising my knowledge of the channel's development. I had the pleasure of participating in its creation, which I consider a great honour, even though it was not for long. Over those dozen or so years, the channel has developed in an absolutely spectacular way. All those who follow Belsat TV will probably agree that it is one of the best initiatives of to the Polish state, especially in the area of creating information and a space of freedom east of the Polish border. This channel has developed so superbly that it has taken a very prominent place – not only in the satellite broadcasting space, but also online. It has developed various language versions: Russian, Belarusian, Ukrainian, English, and Polish. To a very large extent, Belsat TV was financed by the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Actually, that is, until a certain film was made two years ago. It was December 2022. The film I had the honour of making was created precisely on the basis of all I know about Belsat, but also on the basis of what Belsat has been affected by over the many years of its



operation. This entity has evolved into a powerful media institution, flourishing in the post-Soviet space. Belsat TV has become a giant thorn in the side of Belarus – even more so of the Belarusian authorities, but above all, the Kremlin authorities. Belsat spread its wings, broadcasting into a really vast territory. And it influenced that territory with free information. Since the coup against the public media that had taken place on 19–20 December 2023, the condition of this channel horrifies me. Back in 2022, I was convinced that many things could happen in Poland, but certainly not that Belsat channel would be affected. Despite many turbulent years, every turbulence had always been overcome. You could see the importance of this channel, the importance of this television and what it does, the impact it has, while at the same time focusing the viewers' attention not only on the message, but also on the fact that it is being delivered by and from Poland. I do not know how many Belsat people have been spared for the time being. I would like to start

AGNIESZKA ROMASZEWSKA-GUZY

DZIENNIKARKA PRASOWA I TELEWIZyjNA,
DYREKTORKA BIELSAT TV W LATACH 2007–2024



with what happened when Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy was first confronted with the situation. Namely, when she ceased to be head of the channel. I would also mention Aliaksei Dzikavitski, the 'number two man' at the station for many, many years. When we were preparing our panel, we talked about selecting guests, people, representatives from Belsat who could come and tell us what was going on there. We came to the conclusion that it is not worth it because people have too much to lose. This is the situation at the moment. We felt that for the safety of the people, for the safety of their work, for the safety of all that they have created over the many years, for the sake of Belsat, we had to sacrifice these voices at the conference. The two of us will stay and try to talk about Belsat matters so that the information is as complete and up-to-date as possible. Agnieszka, let's start with how it all happened. Was that in January? Or in February?

Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy: To be exact, my first act of dismissal occurred on 12 March 2024. But I think it started much earlier. A distinctive feature that I already had to deal with many times in various conflict situations in the national Polish broadcaster of TVP is that new top authorities – in this case people completely unknown to me – have the habit of not meeting with you. They do not see with you at all, they avoid any contact. It was

a sign of things to come: it is going to be as bad as it can get. Since January, I had been trying to find out what was to happen next. I wrote emails, made phone calls, tried to get an appointment with the liquidator, for it was not quite clear at the beginning who was actually in charge. Was it the CEO or the liquidator? Will they be registered or not? Who actually holds any authority? It was difficult to say. You have to bear in mind that it was December/January when there were those, who stood on guard all the time on all the mezzanines and other passages at the TVP headquarters. Incidentally, it made a big impression on me. It was the first time in my over-30 years of professional engagement that I had experienced something like this. In my 32 years at the national Polish television broadcaster, I have not seen security guards standing on every floor, police 'hanging around' everywhere, and everything locked-off, as if during a terrible occupation. I tried to find out what was actually supposed to be happening. Of course, the reason I was not able to

is because nobody was meeting with me. Hence, sometime around the end of January, I knew it was going to be bad and the situation was most likely to worsen. Even more so, when it was evident that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs would also be cutting our budget. Frankly speaking, this was a lot of naivety on our part. I imagined that after 17 years, no matter what, this television of ours had already been at such a stage of development that we would basically be just growing. Just maybe not as quickly, or not as much as we would like to. For Bielsat TV was never just a TV station. It was also the entire online message package, social networks. First and foremost, TV on YouTube, satellite TV and a plethora of transmission modes.

Mariusz Pilis: How many people worked at Belsat? I mean, at that exact point.

Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy: It is estimated that more than 200 people were employed in 2023. Of course, not all of them worked exclusively at

Belsat, because if you count the work contracts, it usually comes out more. Some people also work elsewhere, but, for example, provide services at Belsat. As I have said, our Belarusian division, in my opinion, reached a certain saturation. It seemed to me that at this political stage, the stage Belarus is at, we would not build anything more. We could only, as if, keep an eye on our TV and page viewership or our social networks traffic. We were supposed to wait for a favourable moment when social activity would awaken again and a new opportunities would arise. This had worked well in previous years: viewers would turn to this channel, they would reach for it again. In contrast, what seemed to be important in terms of development was a Russian-language channel, established in 2017. A sort of a second leg that 'sprouted', as if to separate itself from the Belarusian division, a Russian-language VOD. It was the kind of channel that was supposed to be Russian in terms of the language, but not just Russian in terms of



the identity. It was to discuss the situation in the region. Suddenly, in 2022, it became apparent that the channel and these programmes were gaining popularity. I was convinced of further development, especially as the development so far had taken many years. To be honest, I could not imagine any budget cuts, as the budget had risen sharply from 2019 or so onwards. Keep in mind that in 2020 there was a revolution in Belarus. In 2021 there had been the first attacks at the Polish border and the effects of that Belarusian revolution still persisted, i.e.: we had to evacuate people from Belarus. In fact, close to 100 people had to be evacuated with their families – first to Ukraine, then to

I was convinced that television was only going to grow. And, all of a sudden, here we are. It became clear that the budget was going to be drastically cut down. This spurred a great concern in me. It all started with it. This 'cutting down' matter. Still, I reasoned that we were heading for liquidation. But deep in my heart I could not believe it.

Poland. Then came the full-scale conflict. From February 2022 onwards, colleagues have been broadcasting news programmes for almost 24 hours a day, and certainly for a dozen or so hours a day. And it was live! Clearly, costs were rising, especially as the Russian channel had just been launched. We have incredibly developed social networks. But getting back to the main idea: I was convinced that television was only going to grow. And, all of a sudden, here we are. It became clear that the budget was going to be drastically cut down. This spurred a great concern in me. It all started with it.

This 'cutting down' matter. Still, I reasoned that we were heading for liquidation. But deep in my heart I could not believe it. I hoped I was wrong. Unfortunately, it turned out that – after all – I was right.

Mariusz Pilis: It was then, when the turbulent time began for Belsat. There was a change in leadership. Aliaksei Dzikavitski, who is present with us, became an acting station director. The future was not clear – nor what would happen next. What was the vision for people having been working at Belsat TV at the time? What did it look like? Did you have any headaches? As I understand it, you were no longer admitted to neither the knowl-

edge, the people nor the place where Belsat was located. You could possibly have heard it from conversations with others. Did anyone shared such information with you?

Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy: The TV authorities may do their utmost, but one thing they cannot do: cut me off of information about Belsat. Unless they fire everyone who works there. I was updated on everything that was going on. I have been following the entire matter, although with a great deal of sadness, hoping that maybe this budget reduction would stop one way or another. Besides, there is another

very important aspect. It has been said that there is an editorial within this foreign media centre – this is not true. There is no such editorial. Structurally, there is nothing. This structure is divided into divisions, e.g., economic, production, etc. There is information, and there is journalism. Each of these sections is in different languages. There is not even a single editorial office that is Belarusian-speaking. There are actually two Belarusian-language editors' offices. Yet, there is something I have never witnessed in our reality in such intensity: you are told the opposite of what in fact is. All the time everyone is saying: "But, of course, Belsat is operating." I know it is gone. I know that there is a specific board resolution that sets a certain structure. What can I say to that... Mr. Michał Broniatowski says one thing. And he has no tools to convince me. Is it nowadays that a viewer or a listener is the one who is to believe anyone? How? One can check paperwork. On the other hand – what is the

problem for journalists? First and foremost, with the fact that the elimination of a separate structure is also the elimination of an influence concept towards specific audience. When you are preparing a broadcast station, you do not plan to broadcast the same content to everyone all over the world. A certain station, a certain medium broadcasts for the benefit of a certain audience, and that is what has been removed at the moment.

Mariusz Pilis: Also, a situation took place that raises a great number of questions. This is a matter related to recent events, that is, the removal of Aleksei Dziekavitskiy from the position of acting editor-in-chief and appointing to the position of a person who, of course, used to work at Belsat and took first steps. I remember that person well, too. The woman has moved away into politics. She has accepted a role in the structures supporting Ms. Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. She has now been – with the approval of the current



Maria Giedz, Aleksandra Tabaczyńska, Łukasz Brodzik, SDP



authorities of the Polish national television broadcaster in liquidation – admitted back (please correct me if I am not calling this function right) as director or editor-in-chief of the lone station of 'something'.

Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy: The editor-in-chief is Michał Broniatowski. Let's be clear about that right off the bat.

Mariusz Pilis: Anyway, right to the top. And this is where a surprising situation occurred, which, by the way, the media wrote about and are still writing about today. What is more, and I will return to this thread quickly later, the European institutions have reacted. Namely, following an interview with the new managing director of the station – or this 'post-Bielsat entity' – there were dismissals of two individuals: the editor and the man who interviewed Ms. Alina Koushyk during which he bid farewell to the then still present head, i.e. Aleksei Dziekavitskiy. This situation found a channel of expression: first – our (that is Polish Journalists

Association's) protest and second – our sending of documents to the European Federation of Journalists. Through the Federation of Journalists, we reached out a certain EU-affiliated 'body' for journalist alerts. And, in turn, they reacted seriously in the matter. The case returned just two days ago, as reported by the daily newspaper Rzeczpospolita, writing that an institution affiliated to the Council of Europe is demanding that Poland respects media freedom during the restructuring of Belsat. I just wanted to add that the head of the European Federation of Journalists, Ricardo Gutierrez, has had a number of conversations with people here, trying to establish for himself the bigger picture. Obviously, he relied on what we had been vocal about. But he also independently of us and publicly stated that he had not been convinced by the explanations of the head of this new entity that had been created within the Media Centre for Foreign Affairs under Mr. Michał Broniatowski. This means that it is a very questionable situation.

We will, of course, monitor this matter, but one thing is certain: Belsat, which had an impact, which had an influence, which was clearly an irritant and which was on the list of priorities of Russian and Belarusian states as an element to be eliminated at all possible costs, no longer exists today. The question of whether this is possible to rebuild is a question of the future. I would like to ask what is in store for Bielsat at the moment in a situation when we have such a different reality in the public television. In this case, the television has no chance of working the way it has worked.

Agnieszka Romaszewska-Guzy:

Let me refer to the case of the aforementioned interview, the conversation and what happened afterwards, i.e. the dismissal of the chief information officer. In the case of the interviewer, it was probably he himself who decided to leave. On the one hand, it is a sign that there are courageous journalists. That journalist did a very decent interview, which I thoroughly enjoyed watching: it was done with good manners, politely, yet very insightful and inquisitive. I felt proud watching it. Nevertheless, it was doomed. I had no doubts. I was convinced of the end. I did my best to provide 17 years of 'greenhouse' for my co-workers. Maybe that was the reason they were not fully aware of the situation right to the end. What is next for this editorial team and Belsat as such? I think some sort of Belarusian editorial will be retained. There will also be a Russian editorial – journalist only, for as I said, these are not purely linguistic divisions, but genre divisions. The

Ukrainian editorial still awaits creation. Consequently, there will be some production. Some people will be working at it. I think and suppose – though regrettably – that there will be a significant reduction in personnel. However, 80% of employees, co-workers, are people working on contract or freelance basis. A significant proportion will, quietly, lose their jobs. No one will be made redundant, but the contract will not be renewed. Slowly, gradually. A number of personnel will remain. When it comes to the medium itself, I have always repeated to my personnel: you either go forward or you go backwards. There is no stability here. Consequently, Belsat will obviously be reeling in terms of audience impact as well. The viewers seemingly do not know entirely. They perceive what is being shown on screen. The viewers do not perceive the channel's internal situation directly, but nevertheless, in some mysterious way, it affects them. Let's get back more than 20 years prior. You all probably remember the beginnings of TVN television channel. It was clear that the station was at its best and would grow rapidly. At one point, this was also the case for us. In 2019/2020, Belsat was a station in charge of an absolute and rapid growth. The current situation is the opposite. The biggest issue that really worries me is the fate of the people for whom this is the main source of livelihood. Will they go to work at Biedronka chain-stores? I do not know. Probably so. What is left for those, who tied their lives with this endeavour? I wonder what will happen to our lawyer, who was our lawyer back in Minsk. Then, she had to leave, she

dealt with all the repressed individuals. If they do not renew her contract, what will she do in Poland as a Belarusian lawyer? She does not speak Polish well, despite she is learning. She did not complete legal studies in Poland. We also have a colleague who is imprisoned. His wife and two children are in Poland. She also worked for Belsat. She has been a producer for years. Her husband has a six-year sentence and has been in prison for two years now. What will happen to them next? What will she sustain for? She is a very fit girl, extremely energetic. She will probably think of something.

Mariusz Pilis: The situation of journalists and people working in and around Belsat is so much more difficult than ours. Those are people who have to function in the reality of a different state: they have limited possibilities to

contact, to get jobs, to look for different opportunities for themselves. They found themselves in a very difficult position. The thing that strikes me about all this is the way in which the head of the Media Centre for Abroad reacted to this situation involving the farewell on air by the journalist, Aleksei Dziekavitskiy, who is present here. Namely, he accused publicly, in front of the entire team, this journalist that the interview was conducted as if by an official from the Komsomol. This is what the Rzeczpospolita daily writes about. And I can quote it exactly: *"He countered that it was about saying goodbye to Dziekavitskiy and the interview was reportedly conducted unprofessionally, like a Komsomol secretary. The entire company heard it, says our source"*. And this is said by a man who was head of Interfax Moscow for many years. ■



DISCUSSION

Krzysztof Skowroński

The Belarusian House in Saska Kępa is a place where the Belarusian opposition gathers and various things happen there. I was talking about Belsat TV when a characteristic statement was made about the lack of seriousness of the Polish state. A serious editorial office employing over 200 people was established. Why are we doing this? Because we believe in the Republic of Poland, which should radiate and transmit information. This construction towards the east has been going on with difficulty since 1989. We have had several successes. One of them was Belsat TV. It is true that journalists in Belarus are in prison and have long-term sentences. Young, beautiful girls who took a risk, who talked about what was happening during the revolution. Now these journalists are receiving information that the state and the institution they served are suddenly falling apart for unknown reasons. This is also a very symbolic matter and characteristic of the seriousness of the state and our vision of who we are. We are showing Belarusians, Ukrainians, Lithuanians the non-seriousness of our state. This is the absolute worst thing from the point of view of what happened with Belsat TV

Agnieszka Romaszewska

I absolutely agree. Belsat experienced very different situations. At that time I wondered: "What if they cut the

budget terribly and I don't have the money to pay people? I would have to fire someone. What will I do if they start to liquidate Belsat? What will I tell the employees?" I kept thinking that I would finally have to say: "I apologize to you, gentlemen" – as Józef Piłsudski said. Fortunately, I was released from this necessity. I kept thinking that I would have to resign. It turned out that I no longer had to, because first they fired me and only then they destroyed Belsat. I kept wondering how one could do such a thing – betray people's trust, faith in the mission of the Polish state, that it represents something and means something to its neighbors in the field of so-called "soft power" that is talked about. This "soft power" is a certain attractiveness of the state for others. What is the attractiveness of a state if it is not able to maintain this type of institution? That is where this lie comes from. After all, those who did it cannot admit that they did it. They are distorting reality.

Mariusz Pilis

In such situations, we wonder where the limits of these dramatic actions are and where the limits of this absurdity are. We should always ask ourselves: who benefits from this? The answer here is simple. Russia benefits from this, Alyaksandr Lukashenka benefits from this, all those influences that we have been trying to struggle with for thirty years benefit from this. There

is no doubt here that the role of not only Belsat television has been weakened, but the role of Poland has been weakened, and this at the basic level of media reception, reception of pure, unfettered information, access to information that shapes people's worldviews. Generally, at the moment the situation is such that everyone in the East knows that Belsat has been dealt with. This is evidenced by the voices that appear from time to time, saying that Russia and the Belarusian services no longer demand that Belsat do something wrong.

Michał Rachoń

Of course, I sign under all this. Great respect, Agnieszka, for your work. Great respect for all those who created Belsat and expressions of support for those who are currently repressed. However, in 2023, we knew that something was on the edge. Reading Belsat, I had the impression that if there were any Polish threads there, they sympathized with those who were going for power.

Agnieszka Romaszewska

There were few Polish threads at all. This is a characteristic feature of Belsat. Belsat was founded in 2007. Its idea came about in 2006. During the first PiS government, an agreement was signed between the television and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and immediately afterwards the Platform government came. We started in 2007. It was already the first Platform government, so for the first 8 years we operated with the Platform. Then again in 2016 the drum of democracy turned. It is not known whether it did not jam in our country. In any case, PiS came to power. As part of this, we were constantly navigating with bipartisan support, because we also had our support in the Platform. Most of these people do not have much significance now. At the moment, MP Tyszkiewicz is no longer a member of parliament. I think Grzegorz Schetyna also supported us in a way. Currently, he is on the sidelines, no matter what one says about the Marshal of the Senate. From



Tomasz Sakiewicz, Michał Karnowski, Michał Rachoń

a purely practical point of view, we had to stick to the fact that we are supported by both sides. Now, the situation is such that practically every piece of information about Poland will arouse controversy. In connection with this, we tried to avoid information about Poland as much as possible, to make as little of it as possible. We fought for our lives so that this channel would survive these 17 years. I will return to this "sympathizing" – I do not think that is the case, although there may have been a certain tone and I will explain why. The problem is that when an emigrant comes here – not one who works on a construction site, but one who is an IT specialist, a journalist, functions in intellectual, intelligentsia environments – what does he come into contact with? He speaks relatively poor Polish. He opens the TV. What is the TV like? He opens TVN of course, because if you want to learn Polish, you open TVN most often. What's more? Then he reaches for some Internet. What is the largest website? Onet, right? He opens Onet. And now let's look at the "right side" with some criticism. Is the so-called "the right side" interested in him at all? No, the right side says: "We Poles, we Poles", "For us, Poles", "About us, Poles", "With us, Poles". He doesn't talk about him at all, he doesn't address him. Only those address him, this Belarusian. For some time it was a bit different with Ukrainians, during the immediate post-war period. That's right, believe me, because I read a bit of media from both sides and I see which ones deal with it. This way of thinking, which Krzysztof Skowroński presented,

is unfortunately not popular. Which doesn't mean that someone is against it, it's just that the right-wing media are concerned with themselves. They deal with his problems to a minimal extent. In connection with this, what's happening? In a natural way, he looks at those who, as he believes, deal with him. And the fact that they may not actually deal with him is another thing. And that they have different ideas on how they will actually implement it. In a purely propaganda sense, this is how it looks. If there were any tones that Michał Rachoń spoke about, it was because journalists saw certain issues this way.

Michał Rachoń

However, if we look at media such as Zerkalo or Nexta, one might get the impression that nothing good is ever said about the PiS government. Everything the opposition says was repeated one to one, when it comes to Polish issues. In my opinion, today this has the effect that the will to defend Belsat is slightly lower in certain circles. I repeat, I am not justifying anything here, because you did a great job. I wanted to ask one more question, Agnieszka. Do you think that – as Anita Gargas said in the context of joining TVP – that it involved the methods of the secret police? Do you think that when it comes to destroying Belsat, such methods were also used? Were you investigated? Were there any people caught who could have played the role of traitors at some stage? Why did they destroy it?

Agnieszka Romaszewska

Three reasons why I think Belsat was destroyed. First, it was a mistake to believe that this was done for purely internal political reasons, that I am so political, here they take me down and as a result Belsat is falling apart. That's not how it works. In my opinion, Belsat was destroyed because the current government does not intend to conduct any independent eastern policy. It intends to flow in the absolutely mainstream and possibly in its back part. Therefore, it does not need it. Belsat was such a large and important medium that it irritated Russia, for example. Generally, it was unnecessary for Poland to have such an exceptional tool. Absolutely exceptional on a European scale. It was not eliminated outright, because, as we know, we had PiS governments, and we have a PiS government. Therefore, the current PiS situation is such that we say: "But everything is as it was, very good." In reality, we are reducing the impact of this channel, its possibilities. The second reason is the composition of the entire team that took over the television. To put it mildly, the entire company that came to take over the television and that organically hated this channel. I have been observing this spirit for many years. It was the spirit of hatred towards everything that is ideological, that is, has some idea, is actually noble. And you don't like that. I will quote a fragment of the statement of the master Janusz Szpotański "Comrade Szmaciak": "No one willingly accepts that they are an ordinary idiot when

they have a bad opinion of themselves when they compare themselves to others". That team was not able to withstand it. Generally, we will not jump in this part, Poland does not intend to have any independent actions here.

Mariusz Pilis

Deutsche Welle is enough for us.

Agnieszka Romaszewska

Exactly. We have the Berlin airport, we have Deutsche Welle. What's the matter? Generally, television is enough, as it is. There is no room for any actions that would be any element of disinterestedness or ideology. It is absolutely impossible. As for the question of unraveling. They had no idea what was inside. They had difficulty detecting it during, after I had left.

Mariusz Pilis

This was probably most evident in the crisis related to Internet technical support.

Agnieszka Romaszewska

Yes, it showed they had no idea.

Mariusz Pilis

It turned out to be some incredible story. Suddenly, people who operated the Internet were charged by the prosecutor with something that could be described as follows: I have a computer, you, Michał, use it, at some point you



come to me and say you want this computer. And I have to give it to you. More or less. The structure around operating everything that had to be done on the Internet was externally managed by Belsat, due to the fact that Telewizja Polska was indolent and was not able to do it, as far as I remember.

Michał Rachoń

This is obvious. There is no single model for providing internet infrastructure, as they try to convince you. Sometimes it is renting software, sometimes you have your own. There is no single ideal model, it can be mixed.

Mariusz Piliś

Anyway, it just goes to show how much chaos there was when they were dismantling all this, because they didn't really know what to grab onto, so they pressed charges.

Agnieszka Romaszewska

The prosecutor's office has not yet finally brought these charges, only the television has filed a report. They did

not even know where Belsat was or what was there. They had no idea how many social networks were being run. They had difficulty understanding what they were for. A whole epic of explaining what it actually was, why it was being used. However, they did not really want to or could not understand it. I must say about the extremely low level in terms of professionalism, not to mention morality. The low level of these people is simply unbelievable. The nonsense they talk is indescribable. When I hear Mr. Broniatowski, who – quoting these amounts, in relation to the actually broadcasting television, multilingual, broadcasting in the normal satellite system, not only online, but also online – says that he will have 5 TV channels in different languages and will do everything for this money, it is as if someone told me that for 2 zlotys he makes a full board every day and lives.

Łukasz Brodzik

We had some commissions in Poland on Russian influence. We had Russian spies. If someone could benefit from it, they could also work for it. What you are saying is important: they will not

say directly why they are closing down Belsat. If they admitted it, they could be directly accused of working for Putin, in agreement with him and maybe even on his orders. Of course, no one will say that, and I will not say that at this point either, but the question is, shouldn't we look for such threads? This is a very big and serious accusation, but in my opinion it cannot be ruled out.

Agnieszka Romaszewska

It is obvious to me that for almost all of the 17 years, only in an intensifying way, the services were operating here, both Belarusian and then Russian, or perhaps Russian to an even greater extent, because they are probably stronger and more powerful. How do such services operate? First of all, through inspiration. It often involves suggesting something to the decision-maker or inciting him against someone. This is very dangerous and unnecessary, and at the same time obvious in Belarus since 2020. During the PiS government, in 2016-2017, there were attempts to start rather unfortunate talks with Lukashenko. At that time, there was an idea to close Belsat, so that relations would improve significantly. Fortunately, this did not happen. Several times we were on the verge of survival. As a result of very specific actions, intrigues, around 2020, the station was almost going bankrupt. Fortunately, we managed to reverse it somehow each time, for example in 2020 thanks to direct intervention from the government top itself. This time it didn't work. Who incited what? Who said what at the

Ministry of Foreign Affairs? Who is advising whom and what on TV? Unfortunately, I can't say that and I won't risk making such statements, because they are far-reaching. I am certain that such influences can, and most probably do, exist.

Mariusz Piliś

I will put a period in this particular place. It seems that the situation is so serious and the history is so serious that at some point, it must become the subject of a very thorough analysis and investigation of who is really behind it. Perhaps at some point it will also turn into some investigative journalistic work, from which it will be clear who dismantled the Belsat media. However, it seems that this is definitely not the time. At the moment, no one has such a will and this is understandable by itself. However, this is such a serious matter that it must end in an investigation already conducted by the Polish state, because it borders on harming Polish interests. I guess we have no illusions in this matter.

Krzysztof Skowroński

The Romaszewski family has been pursued by the security services for about 50-60 years. In connection with the above, Agnieszka Romaszewska has such a bad effect on the services that the thought of someone independent running anything in a place that is not supposed to be independent was so bad and so alien that it had to end like this. Such a family reflection. ■

SUMMARY

Mariusz Pilis

I think the conclusion that has been permeating all of our discussions is: What happened on December 19/20, 2023, is the criminal foundation of what we are dealing with today. If we were to sum up this year not only from the media perspective, but also from the perspective of events concerning various spheres of our country – starting with the justice system, moving on to the military, security, economy and others – all of this has its source in this action, which was to deprive part of society of access to free and unrestricted information through the invasion and seizure of public media in Poland. This is also visible in the way Polish viewers migrated from public media towards those that provided them with a different message than the one they were accustomed to from TVN, but also Polsat. Poles in huge numbers were looking for information that would in some way constitute a counterpoint to everything they were dealing with. The authorities were aware of this, and therefore led to solutions, which – referring to the statement of our lieutenant colonel, former Minister of Culture – led to actions of which he is proud. He is still proud of the fact that he led to a situation in which he gagged the public media, turned off the signal. Let us recall: for the first time since martial law, the signal of Polish Television was zero! This is what we were dealing with. Since then, the data has been

continuously compiled by us and collected by the Association of Polish Journalists. People lost their jobs, were dismissed by mutual consent or were forced to sign separation from the media, because in a situation in which they did not do so, disciplinary dismissal awaited them.

Hubert Bekrycht

We have naturally focused on television here. I also believe that we should talk about it, because it is the most visual for the recipient. We want to make them aware of how this criminal attack on television and the theft of public media also affect their lives. However, let's not forget about the radio, about the Polish Press Agency, my former company. We need to collect information, we need to look at what they are doing – not impose some monitoring on these ridiculous puppet authorities, but talk. We need to tell the recipients as much as possible: "This and that is how much you have lost." We could have had a war, God forbid. A crime against the state is happening before our eyes. Let's not forget about it.

Łukasz Brodzik

The government could be called a "government of liquidation" because the liquidation was taking place in various institutions, but it started with the media. It is therefore symbolic, because it shows how important the

message is, how important the media is, how important journalists are. If it starts with them, it means that they are very important. As for the reasons for the liquidation and its effects, first of all the message was taken over, journalists were thrown out and intimidated. The liquidation is ongoing – we also need to make our recipients aware of this – public media and the people who remained there are still being removed. And there are many of them left, including from my trade union. According to the liquidator, they can be thrown out on any pretext and – also according to the liquidator – no law applies to them. Under the pretext of the liquidation, until it is over, employed journalists are trembling for their jobs. As soon as we were dismissed, a list of over thirty journalists who were to be dismissed began to circulate on our radio. Pale fear fell on many people. We have further effects, which are still ongoing. In addition to destroying public media, let us recall that Donald Tusk

called for non-payment of subscription fees. Other consequences include the fact that someone employed in a public medium cannot, for example, take out a loan. A company that is in liquidation is not a partner for a bank. Suddenly, people realize what is at stake for them. And now let's move on to local media. In provinces such as Lubuskie, there are not many other media in which one could work. You would have to create your own, but now, create media, watch the authorities' hands without having an editorial office, without having legal protection. In our province, journalists were threatened. I personally was also threatened, and this at the level of the deputy mayor, who said that I would not be able to do the things I do for a long time. We had an insult to the "external honor". Janusz Życzkowski sued the marshal of the province, the lady who spoke about mercury in the Oder. It was said that he had insulted the "external part". They brought Mr. Chmaj's office from Warsaw to Zielona



Hubert Bekrycht, journalist of the Polish Press Agency, dismissed in December 2024, secretary general of Polish Association of Journalists (SDP)

Góra to defend the marshal against the journalist. In Lubuskie, no one sticks their neck out because they know that as soon as someone does this, they will bring in some constitutionalist from Warsaw and he will accuse them. Finally, we also know journalists who cannot find work anywhere. They say that no public institution that we have influence over should employ a given person. Now I will breathe a little optimism, quoting a priest I know: "Organized evil must be opposed by organized good." We have to create. We have a trade union in our radio station, which has de facto defended us. We have the Association of Polish Journalists and the Press Freedom Monitoring Center, which sends its observers to court cases. The presence of an observer at all hearings is very important information for the court. In addition, the court receives an amicus curiae, where there is a series of described and refuted allegations of the liquidator against us. We need to invest in this, put in a lot of work and commitment, even though we are from different media. It is also important to educate a new generation of journalists, because after all, someone will have to work in these media in the future.

Mariusz Pilis

Look at what has happened in one year. Look at the demands that are being made, the reflections on what this year has brought us, what it is closing with. Here we have the heads of Telewizja wPolsce24, Republika and Radio Wnet. Generally, these are excellent

examples of how this fundamentally bad and pessimistic situation can be used to build something positive.

Anna Popek

I think it's time to introduce fables and Aesopian speech into the public space, because if there is censorship – I think we're all convinced that there is – then we have to act differently. We've already dealt with this, first of all. Secondly, I've received information from colleagues from public television that not only are they not paying their salaries, but they're also using mobbing and some terrible actions, bordering on psychological harassment. This institution is degenerating very quickly. Those who stayed want to leave and are looking for work outside this company. The third is: it's great that there are private media, but I think we need to additionally develop all social media on all possible fronts. We used a poster (editor's note on the cover), which was an invitation to our conference, made by Wojciech Korkuć. At this point, we would like to thank Mr. Wojciech Korkuć for preparing such a visualization. It was made specifically so that it would spread on social media in a different context than a heavy, gloomy conference on sad and serious topics, as it is today. It is interesting mainly for us, journalists and for people for whom the state is important. But the rest of society does not live by it as much as we do and for them it is perhaps a bit boring, so I think we also need to find some easy, nicer and such an etiquette way of reaching people

with this information that "today us, and tomorrow maybe you". Journalists are one social, professional group, but there are more such groups and maybe it will "spill over" to others. So we need to warn. In short, in social media we have to be attractive, we have to say interesting content in a nice and quite short way.

Michał Karnowski

Telewizja wPolsce24, on September 2nd we launched on MUX and also in a new formula. We stood on our feet, I would say, in a difficult market environment. We are developing and we see that the stronger we stand on our feet, the greater the attacks we experience, from different sides, by the way. But yes, once we did not want one newspaper in the country. I think that today we do not want one television, so let us also enjoy this

pluralism. Thank you for all the kind words. I encourage you to check your cable networks, whether on MUX, or ask an operator who will launch it for free. You can also see us on the Internet. To sum up, often when talking to people who left TVP, I have the impression that they think that this situation is temporary. I want to tell you that we cannot have any illusions. Even the presidential elections will not change this system immediately. These are illusions. We have at least three years ahead of us, if, God willing, it will not be longer. We must also all remember that we are operating in extremely difficult conditions, because the market environment here is extremely difficult – I say this from the position of a member of the company's board. The station that broadcasts Telewizja wPolsce24 and publishes the weekly and runs the wpolityce.pl portal has constant obstacles thrown in its way.



Access to distribution, access to advertising, access to everything that is obvious to these powerful media is very difficult here. Sometimes you have to fight for it, beg for it, sometimes you have to ask for it, and sometimes none of this helps here, but the response of people is incredible. The response of viewers, readers. Poles probably recognized that public media have been taken away from them, so they will support private media that have taken on this public mission. And I, you, thank you for this support, because we, as Telewizja wPolsce24, also feel it and I hope that it will continue to be so. Let us remember that the beginning of this attack on public media was, in my opinion, the beginning of the attack on our freedom, our sovereignty in general. Because taking away freedom will be followed by taking away our independence. It is taken so that, enslaved, we would not be able to protest. This is also such a challenge, not only for journalists and the media, but for all citizens. Our generation must defend the free Poland that it received as a gift. I pray that we will not have to defend in an active, "Maidan" way, but today I would not rule it out, because if we hear that the presidential elections may not be recognized, what else can we hear?

Mariusz Pilis

Our duty in such a situation is to do what we have to do and this can be recommended to everyone. Radio Wnet fights every day with a completely irrational formula related to

the possibilities of financing the radio. Radio Wnet has been recording a huge influx of listeners for a year, and those who are aware, who willingly throw in their penny, thanks to which you function. Does this give you satisfaction?

Krzysztof Skowroński

This gives us enormous satisfaction. At the beginning of 2024, only days or hours separated us from the moment when we would have to say that Radio Wnet could no longer function. Everything was hanging by a thread. There was and is a lot of will in me and the employees to sail this boat further. The support of listeners is so great that we have a really safe voyage ahead of us for the next month or two. In 2009, when the radio was founded, we wrote real, public media and now we are trying to fulfill the role of truly public media. We are where the media that are being liquidated are not. We talk about Poland in a way that is no longer told there. This is something that gives us a lot of strength and a lot of energy. We do it with great satisfaction, joy, but also with great effort. I also have an additional reason to be happy: Thanks to the fact that Jolanta Hajdasz became the president of the Association of Polish Journalists, from a certain point I can invite the president of the SDP to the radio and interview him. Thanks to this, the listeners of Radio Wnet know that such an important conference is taking place at the Association of Polish Journalists. They are definitely cheering us on and watching the broadcast, which is

on the sdp.pl portal. And I will say that the Association's power of attraction is also much greater. Because now we, or wPolsce24, wPolityce or Radio Wnet or Telewizja Republika or all those who create YouTube channels, are small, but in total we have a whole constellation of such stars that attract. In this constellation, a very important place is the Association of Polish Journalists, because here we can really talk about the media situation. This is a great contribution of Jolanta Hajdasz. I am very glad that such a conference took place.

Aleksandra Tabaczyńska

For millions of viewers, the new opening credits of the main "Wiadomości" became an unforgettable symbol of changes in TVP shortly after the Law and Justice Party won the parliamentary elections in October 2015. Jacek Kurski became the President of the Management Board of

Telewizja Polska. In the original version from January 2015, Wiadomości began with a flight over three cities: Gdańsk, Kraków and Warsaw, which ended with a shot of the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw and a close-up of the clock on its tower. In other words, it ended with an open reference to the Soviet symbol of the torturers of Poles. The removal, by the new authorities of the television in 2016, of the so-called Stalin Palace and replacing it with the Royal Castle in Warsaw, clearly showed that from now on, Telewizja Polska would put the welfare of its viewers first, and its message was focused on rebuilding the national community.

I am the only one – in this group of journalists – who would like to speak about the Polish Television in liquidation from the viewer's point of view. Although I have never worked in television, for years I have been following various productions both on TVP and in commercial centers. Due to my



Aleksandra Tabaczyńska, treasurer of Polish Association of Journalists (SDP)

profession, my special interest has always been information and broadly understood journalism. With full awareness and no small delight, I followed the changes that took place when Jacek Kurski (president TVP) took over TVP. In front of millions of viewers, the information monopoly that TVP and the two main commercial stations had been jointly creating for years was broken. Practically until the end of 2015, not only the comments on the information provided were very similar, but even the order in which they were broadcast, and thus the importance of the presented news. It was not until the Law and Justice Party won the elections that TVP became the narrative pillar of the Polish *raison d'état*. In its message, it referred to the national identity of Poles, to patriotism, promoted Polish culture, beauty and the richness of the country's nature. It was Telewizja Polska, headed by President Jacek Kurski,

that provided millions of viewers with access to high-quality coverage of sporting events, new series, theatre, education, reliable information about Poland and the world and of course, mass entertainment. Poles loved their television, and so did I, for which I am very grateful and I thank its creators from the bottom of my heart.

Mariusz Pilis

We are finishing our conference. I would like to thank Jolanta Hajdasz, because she worked very hard to organize our meeting. I would like to thank all the panelists for participating in our conference. I hope that we will enter the next year with hope, which will certainly be very dynamic and interesting. It may be dangerous, but it may bring us solutions that we are not looking at today and that we cannot see yet. ■



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Stanowisko prezydium Zarządu Głównego Stowarzyszenia Dziennikarzy Polskich oraz protesty SDP W OBRONIE MEDIÓW PUBLICZNYCH

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HUBERT BEKRYCHT: Od czego gorsza jest nadgorliwość?



SZÓSTE KÓŁKO... W MÓZGU
WALTER ALTERMANN: Skandal na początku Igrzysk Olimpijskich. Francja nie-elegancja



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WOŁODYMYR SYDORENKO: Związek dziennikarzy walczących...

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Śmiałą tezę stawia CEZARY KRYSZTOPA: PiS ukradł sto bilionów



HISTORIA ODKŁAMANA
TADEUSZ PŁUŻAŃSKI: Lekarze na usługach bezpieczeństwa



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