



## ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ МЕДИАСИСТЕМЫ В ПОЛЬШЕ ПОСЛЕ 1989 г.

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В статье рассматриваются основные процессы и итоги трансформационных процессов в медиасистеме Польши в постсоциалистический период.

Ключевые слова: Польша, массмедиа, переходный период, авторитаризм, трансформация, демократия

### Introduction

Over the last twenty years, the mass media system in Poland has developed on a scale that is unprecedented in the whole twentieth century. The media industry has become an essential and increasingly important part of the national economy; trends and processes recorded in the industry reflect the phenomena occurring in a number of other areas of society, especially in the field of politics. Having started in 1989, the transformation of the system with its constituent phenomena and political, economic and social processes, has resulted in the creation of an entirely new media order where the media market has taken on free market economy characteristics – pluralism, competition, private property, uncapped pricing and free movement of capital and labour. Today's Polish media system has been shaped to a large extent by the events that took place in public life during the transformation of the system, especially in its initial phase (1989 – 1993). During this period the legal, political and economic conditions under which the media operated were totally changed. These changes led to a thorough reconstruction of the entire media industry, in its institutional as well as social dimension. During political transformation the media played a dual role; they were both subject and object of the occurring democratisation processes. Political transformation and related phenomena resulted in a thorough reconstruction of the media system as well as the rules on which it was built and which dictated its inner order. The Communist Party lost their newspaper publishing and radio and television broadcasting monopolies. The ownership structure of the media was changed too and the restrictions on freedom of speech were lifted. Many journalists had to leave publishing as they were irreversibly discredited by their previous servile attitude towards the regime press. It is worth looking at the process of media transformation from another perspective. Without the media and their social functions the process of democratisation and its demands would never have been fully realised. Political transformation is a complex process involving a number of stages and dimensions. It is determined by a wide range of factors and has a multitude of consequences. As such, it must have resulted in a new, hitherto alien, Polish media. These phenomena, occurring within the structures of the media, had a certain level of influence on their external environment and acted as a catalyst for the process of system transformation, which had first initiated and directed them. As argued by Franciszek Ryszka, the transformation of the media should be considered in a specific triad: the message sender – the message – the message recipient. Each of these elements defines the process of transformation and decides on its course [1, c. 19]

The aim of this paper is to provide a brief account of the changes that occurred in the Polish media during political transformation, when both state and society moved gradually away from the authoritarian model of socio-political relations. The media is presented here primarily as an object of the transformation; a subsystem of the general social system, undergoing a profound modernisation process associated with democratisation of the political regime and the emergence of a market economy. The author also presents the media as a



catalyst of social and political change, involved in facilitating and directing modernisation processes. This dual role in the transformation process bestows on the media a high level of importance in the public realm, among other involved entities responsible for the course, pace and effectiveness of the democratisation of the socio-political system. In this article, the mass media is shown as an exploratory field of sorts for the system transformation understood in terms of great social change, defined by the appearance, disappearance or restructuring of existing elements of social reality [2].

### **The dimensions of the media system transformation**

The changes within the mass media, a natural consequence of the evolution of political systems from a socialist to democratic state models, occurred throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Such processes took place in all types of media and all areas of journalism and included both quantitative and qualitative transformation processes [3, с. 43].

In Poland in the late 80s the communist government launched a policy of gradual liberalisation of political and social life. The move was caused by a steadily worsening social mood and the collapse of the central economy, which proved to be ineffective and failed to meet basic consumer needs. This resulted in numerous strikes and other forms of public displays of dissatisfaction with the socio-economic system, which was held to be undemocratic and characterised by permanent crisis. The government on the one hand believed that the anti-communist opposition was weak. On the other hand, however, it was argued that the economic situation of the country had to be improved. This resulted in talks with representatives of the opposition, incorporating democratic organizations in the process of reformation in what at the time was a communist country. The talks, named "The Polish Round Table Talks", took place between the 6th of February and the 5th April 1989 and included primarily political and social activists gathered in the largest Polish opposition movement "Solidarnosc" ("Solidarity") and representatives of the government; mainly the members of "Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza" ("Polish United Workers' Party"). The negotiations resulted in signature of an agreement that stated that the reform of Polish political and economic system should be implemented gradually, upon strong foundations of political pluralism, freedom of speech, strong local government, democratic appointment of representative bodies of state power and further development of the free market. The provisions of the Round Table triggered the process of vehement decomposition of the political system of the Peoples' Republic of Poland and the collapse of the dictatorship of PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party). Poland embarked on a long process of establishing a liberal democratic system [4].

The Round Table initiated public debate on the objectives, directions and expected results of democratic transformation in all areas of the social system, including mass media. They also facilitated the creation of the doctrinal basis for all future regulations and mechanisms used in the process of media transformation. This transformation covered two fundamental dimensions of media system operations:

1. legal-political aspect, regarding constitutional and statutory regulations of journalism and media functioning as social institutions, in particular defining the scope of freedom of speech and rights and obligations of the media;
2. economic aspect, regarding media operations as market entities, particularly addressing the issues of ownership and concentration of the capital in the media market.

The changes that took place in the initial phase of Polish system transformation (1989-1993) are largely responsible for the reconstruction of the media. The conclusion of the Round Table agreements (5 April 1989) was the turning point in the process of the Polish media democratisation. The agreement addressed the issue of modernisation of the system of social communication and defined the main objectives as well as the basic mechanisms of this process. The period of most intensive changes in the media, stemming from the transition from authoritarianism to democracy concluded with the Law on Radio and Television entering into force on the 1st of March 1993. The Law implemented a new order in the sphere of electronic media and sanctioned most of rules of the functioning of the mass media



developed by the democratic circles which were granted the governing powers after the collapse of communism in Poland.

### **The reconstruction of the legal basis of the media**

One of the features of the socio-political system in the Peoples' Republic of Poland was the strict control of the state authorities over the media. Officially, the communist state guaranteed all the citizens, including the media, the right to exercise freedom of speech and expression. Article 71 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Poland of July 22, 1952, stated that the People's Republic of Poland guarantees freedom of speech, press, assembly, rallies, marches and demonstrations. In addition, Article 62 of the Constitution granted citizens the right to enjoy national art and to actively participate in the development of national culture through "the development and sharing libraries, books, newspapers and the radio with the working people of the city and in the country". On the 26th of January, 1984, the Press Law was adopted by the Parliament of the People's Republic of Poland. It granted the freedom of press understood as freedom of speech, freedom to obtain information and freedom of expression. These guarantees, however, were purely illusory as in reality the communist state never complied with regulations regarding the freedom of expression. In Poland, from the very beginning of Communist rule, media was always strictly controlled via a number of legal and institutional measures. It meant that the rules of positive law applied in the normative system, controlling the freedom of expression and sanctioning the operations of censorship in the structure of public administration; on the other hand, the an office existed that was responsible for conducting censorship activities and the control of all speeches addressed to the general public to evaluate their conformity with the general direction of political views of the Communist Party and the government. In the period 1946-1981, censorship functioned under the decree of the State National Council of the appointment of the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows. The law granted control of publications and presentations to both regional offices, acting as an authority of first instance and the Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows acting as the central authority [5, c. 72]. The communist censorship exercised an almost unfettered ability to interfere in the content of media publications. This was possible because the legal basis of its operation was general and vague, allowing for a wide scope of interpretation. The decree of State National Council of the 5th of July 1946 allowed the censors "to monitor press, publications and shows" as well as "to control sharing of the all types of artistic works in print, video and spoken word". At the same time the decree prohibited the dissemination of any songs, the text of which "might affect the structure of the Polish State, international alliances, claiming false and violate good morals." The interpretation of vague legal standards was the responsibility of the censor and exercised by the censor in practice. The decision was final and not subject to appeal by any independent body. In practice, this allowed publication of almost any text to be blocked. The way vague legal norms were interpreted depended solely on the censor, and his decision was final and was not be subject to appeal by any independent body. In practice, it meant that the publication of almost any text could be blocked.

The Polish media was not as strongly dependant on the government as was the case in other Eastern bloc countries but, still, dependency was evident and it limited the freedom of expression by journalists and thus greatly impaired the process of creation of public opinion. As Jerzy Jarowiecki noted, it was common for ruling Party officials to direct and limit criticism of their actions, but large scope of subjects existed which were not to be addressed [3, c. 44]. Such "untouchable" subjects included Soviet crimes during the Second World War, Soviet aggression towards Poland on the 17th of September 1939 and severe repression against Polish citizens during the Stalinist period. Every newspaper article or radio and television broadcast prior to its publication had to obtain the official approval of the censorship office. By 1975, even the drafting of laws and Members of Parliament speeches were put through strict censorship review. Also, "publications" such as instruction manuals, postage stamps, official forms or labels had to be controlled. In 1975, the obligation to monitor



the content of some of these forms was abolished but the duty to censor music was introduced.

The postulate to free the media from the direct control of the State and terminate censorship was one of the most significant political and legal demands of the democratic opposition. It constituted one of the provisions of the Round Table negotiations and was recorded in "The Report on the Work of the Sub-Committee on Mass Media" - one of the teams of substantive work of the Round Table on the directions of socio-political changes of the system. As regards Press Law, the team adopted the common view that publishing should no longer be subject to licensing and that a system of application (registration) should be implemented instead. The restrictions on the transfer and acquisition of publications, printed materials and audiovisual programmes from abroad were also abolished. Moreover, the operation of underground publishing offices (so-called "second circulation") was made legal. Free circulation of paper and publishing devices also commenced [6, c. 26 – 27]. The Sub-Committee on Mass Media evaluated the Polish system of social communication; their opinion was very critical, stating that the system was outdated and inadequate to accommodate the changes that were occurring. The participants strongly expressed their opinion supporting the democratisation and pluralisation of the media, specifying the features of the media that were deemed significant from the perspective of public interest, such as providing full and unbiased information, expressing diverse public opinion, controlling ruling authorities, revealing and mitigating social conflicts and tensions or being involved in the process of implementing democratic reforms. Any subsequent political decisions and legal regulations regarding the media were further developed and formalised by provisions of the Round Table. One such regulation was "Ustawa o uchyleniu ustawy o kontroli publikacji i widowisk, zniesieniu organów tej kontroli oraz zmianie ustawy Prawo Prasowe" ("Law on repealing the law on control of publications and spectacles, abolishing controlling bodies and amending the Press Law") passed by the Parliament on the 11th of April, 1990. The Act created the legal basis for unrestricted freedom of the media in Poland, resulting in the total liquidation of the system of preventive censorship, which had been in operation for almost fifty years. It also brought a new meaning to Art. 1 of the Press Law of 1984, according to which: "The press, as stated in the Polish Constitution, exercises the right of freedom of expression, embodies the right of citizens to receive reliable information, transparency of public life and social control and criticism" [5, c. 73].

A very important consequence of the changes in the Polish media law in 1989-1990 was the sanctioning of freedom of expression. The abolition of censorship brought closure to the period of media gagging. Soon, press articles and broadcasts began to appear that would not have been approved previously, due to their alleged anti-state character. Also, major changes took place in terms of the ideological and philosophical orientation of the media. In public discourse, programs and publications of a religious nature were introduced; previously they had been almost completely absent. On the other hand, publications reflecting the Marxist beliefs disappeared, even from the post-communist press. Settlement journalism flourished, mainly focussing on the verification of Polish history after 1945. Previously forbidden topics, for decades of banned by censorship, gradually found a place in the media [6, c. 26 – 27].

### **Demonopolisation and deregulation of the media market**

Elimination of political control over the media, sanctioned by the Act of the 11th of April, 1990, could not in itself constitute a sufficient stimulus for deep, multifaceted reconstruction of mass communication. The destruction of long-standing institutional and economic structures was unavoidable, as they greatly restricted the free development of the system as expected by society and defined during the Round Table talks. Media transformation was not possible without prior dissolution of the media monopoly that existed in the market. The media monopoly was first created in Communist Poland in 1947, when the Workers Publishing Cooperative "Press" was founded under the resolution of the Communist Party.



The cooperative, which included 14 publishers and printing companies throughout the country, took over the vast majority of newspapers and magazines in the market, which led to the state control of most Press and publishing organisations. The title of the new publisher became the "Trubuna Ludu" ("Tribune of the People") – the official publication of the Polish United Workers' Party.

A progressive centralisation of the press system and gradual limitations of pluralism became manifest through a number of subsequent decisions of communist governments of People's Republic of Poland. The Polish United Workers' Party contributed to the creation of a new, monopolistic entity in the Polish press; the Workers' Publishing Cooperative "Prasa – Książka – Ruch" ("Press – Book – Traffic"), on the 1st of January, 1973. The organisation was founded by merging three existing bodies: RSW "Prasa" (WPC "Press"), the publishing house "Książka i Wiedza" ("Book and Knowledge") and the Press and Book Distribution Company "Ruch" ("Traffic"). The cooperative became the largest newspaper corporation in Central and Eastern Europe at that time. The Workers' Publishing Cooperative was responsible for all the Party's publishing requirements, as well as the majority of informational, political, economic, social, cultural character newspapers and magazines as well as those dedicated to sports, youth and women. In 1975, WPC controlled the market, having 46 newspapers and 190 periodicals, as well as books, calendars, postcards, and music records. The cooperative had developed a network of printers and distribution points, had their own holiday resort and even a research and development centre (Press Research Centre in Krakow). Only minor titles were published outside the "Press – Book – Traffic" structure in this period, including the publications of the peasant movement, community organizations, churches, educational periodicals, and, of greater significance, the newly emerging underground press, not approved by the censorship - so called "the second publishing cycle".

After 1989, a necessary condition for the democratisation of the media market in Poland was its pluralisation. This required the liquidation of state monopoly, regarding both printed press and electronic media. The first step towards building a new democratic media communication system was made during the Round Table negotiations; the agreement regulating the legal capacity of the independent and anti-government circles to publish titles like the daily "Gazeta Wyborcza" ("Electoral Gazette"), "Tygodnik Solidarnosc", the weekly magazine of the Independent Self-governing Trade Union of Individual Farmers "Solidarity" and other, smaller, usually local publications of "Solidarity". The creation of the first of these titles – non-communist newspaper "Gazeta Wyborcza" was of key importance to the development of Polish democracy. The first issue, containing 8 pages, was published on the 8th of May, 1989 with of 150,000 copies being circulated. A year later, the journal, led by Adam Michnik, boasted the largest circulation of all Polish newspapers. From the beginning "Gazeta Wyborcza" managed to interest its readers with modern formulas and a wide range of substantive content - thorough coverage of national and international issues - but also paid sufficient attention to local issues; in 1991 "GW" already run 13 regional supplements [6, c. 26 – 27]. The birth of a new, independent gazette broke the monopoly of the Communist Party publishing and national daily press monopoly. The old organisational structures that were based on the Workers' Publishing Cooperative 'Press Book Traffic' continued to exist in the market, but were based on an economic reality that had passed. This hampered the development of independent press initiatives. On the 19th of March, 1990, the first non-communist government headed by Tadeusz Mazowiecki adopted a bill to liquidate the WPC. Three days later, the Sejm (the lower house of the Polish Government) passed the Bill that had been submitted by the Council of Ministers and on the 6th of April, 1990, the Prime Minister appointed the Liquidation Commission, which superseded the existing Cooperative management and was given oversight of the WPC liquidation process. The liquidation was to proceed in two ways: some titles were to be passed on to journalistic cooperatives created by their employees; some were sold on the open market. "The liquidation of the WPC group and related restructuring of the Polish press began in late autumn of 1990. It was marked by the largest privatisation ever to have taken place in Poland, which was inevitably



accompanied by heated discussions and sparked widespread dissent. The old guard were not to give up their lucrative posts easily. At the same time, new political parties, trade unions, social organisations and individuals, as well as Polish and foreign investors wishing to enter the Polish media market, showed great interest in taking over existing magazines and newspapers previously published WPC. This interest resulted primarily from the fact that, at the time, it seemed easier to acquire existing and recognised titles than to create totally new ones" - remarks Katharina Schliep [8, c. 132].

By June 1991 the titles formerly belonging to WPC had been auctioned. The titles were purchased by various entities including private enterprises, political parties, social organisations and foreign investors (mainly German, French and Scandinavian) [9, 88 – 101]. The most bullish foreign investor was a French concern that belonged to Robert Hersant; he acquired seven dailies published previously by WPC. As a result of the WPC liquidation, hundreds of autonomous, independent magazines were launched, whose activity was subjected to free-market mechanisms. With the onset of competition the media market became filled with a variety of new titles. While the number of cultural, literature and socio-political magazines decreased, there was a significant quantitative increase in dailies and mass audience magazines. In the first years of transformation the annual increase in the number of titles was 3 to 6 percent. In 1994, 1996 and 1998, however, double-digit growth was recorded (+26.04 percent, +20.21 percent, +12.01 percent respectively). In other years the recorded increase in the number of newspapers in the market amounted to (in percent.): +5.49 (1989), +5.97 (1993), +8.14 (1995), +3.97 (1999) [10, c. 190]. In this period reading preferences were clearly changing - the sales of daily publications dropped in favour of weekly, fortnightly and monthly magazines. The Europeanization of Polish readers took place as they began to enjoy the diverse media market, choosing illustrated magazines, consumer guides and gossip press [7, c. 36]. In the group of magazines aimed at a mass audience the growth of women's magazines was particularly rapid and dynamic. The number of titles that can be classified in this group increased as well as their circulation. Readership surveys conducted in the first years of transformation in Poland showed that these titles were most popular and most often read. Virtually every household had at least one copy of so-called "colour magazine" for women [11, c. 171]. The publications included some titles created and popularised during the communist era, such as "Kobieta i Zycie" ("Woman and Life"), "Przyjaciolka" ("The Friend"), "Zwierciadlo" ("The Mirror"), which, since 1989 had been run by private owners. Some titles were new, including reprints of mainly German magazines. The first foreign title aimed at women was "Burda", which was launched in Poland in 1990. Shortly after, other titles followed: "Tina", "Swiat Kobiety" (The Woman's World) and "Chwila dla Ciebie" ("Your Moment"), published by the Heinrich Bauer Verlag GmbH; "Claudia" and "Naj" ("The Best"), published by Gruner+Jahr; and "Z zycia wziete" ("Real Life"), "Sukcesy i Porazki" ("Successes and Failures") and "Kalejdoskop Losow" ("Kaleidoscope of Fates") published by Phoenix Media. Additionally, new types of publications that had previously been absent in the market appeared, including advertising periodicals, children's, youth, environmental magazines, consumer guides, erotic publications and also new, religious, Catholic titles, which could not have existed prior to 1989 because of ideological reasons.

As a result of the liquidation of the monopoly in the publishing market, there was rapid growth in the local and regional press, particularly in regions with a long tradition of issuing such publications, in many cases since the nineteenth century (Silesia, Pomerania, Greater Poland). Before 1989, apart from a few titles issued by either by WPC "Press Book Traffic" or by local associations and other community organisations, the communication infrastructure capable of meeting the needs of information was virtually non-existent at a local level. With the abolition of legal, political and economic restrictions, local press entered a phase of intensive development, thanks mainly to the former opposition circles, gathered around the "Solidarity" movement, which issued their own publications to distribute during local and national election campaigns [12, c. 48]. In the period preceding Poland's first free post-war local government elections (27th of May, 1990) local markets boasted almost



1,200 titles; at the end of 1991 - more than 1420. The local periodicals, created at the time, were dominated by political journalism, which bordered on propaganda. After some time, as a result of political stabilisation, some of these publications changed their character, transforming their content to include informational, entertaining or sensational material. Some were closed, mainly for economic reasons. The resulting void was filled by local periodicals that were founded by new entities, whose presence in the publishing market was made possible by the amendments in the press law and the significant expansion of the number of potential publishers. This group included local governments, private individuals, companies, NGOs, journalist cooperatives and the Catholic Church [12, c. 48]. In 1996, of the 1700 local magazines published in Poland, privately owned journals accounted for 30 percent of the market, local authority magazines 41 percent, NGO run newspapers 14 percent and parish magazines over 13 percent. Local political party press and that of trade unions constituted 2 percent of the market [13, c. 28].

The deconstruction the old order in radio and television was conducted almost in parallel with the liquidation of monopolistic structures in the press market in Poland. Before 1989, as was the case for the press, electronic media was strictly centralized and subordinated to the hegemony of the Polish United Workers' Party. Radio and television functioned as an element of monocentric "from top to bottom" system of communication [14, c. 52 – 53]. From the 4th of February 1949 this system was by managed by the Central Office for Radio Broadcasting established by a parliamentary resolution, supported by the Committee for Radio Broadcasting "Polish Radio" (1951 – 1960) and the Committee for Radio and Television Broadcasting "Polish Radio and Television" (1960 to 1989). This Committee was the central organ of state administration, subordinate to the Prime Minister and operated as a "government body regarding the creation and broadcasting of radio and television programmes for the general public". Committee responsibilities included: establishing guidelines for the development of radio and television broadcasting in Poland; creating programmes; building and utilising radio and television stations (on an exclusive basis); promoting artistic, scientific and literary creation for radio and television and facilitating international cooperation in this field. In practice, the Committee remained subordinate to the Communist Party and exercised undivided and unlimited powers over electronic media, using radio and television to spread the communist ideology and strengthen the public monopoly structure in this sector. Following the formation of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's cabinet, the management of the Committee for Radio and Television Broadcast changed; in September 1989 anti-communist opposition activist Andrzej Drawicz was appointed the head of the Committee. These changes enabled the concept of a new system of radio and television to come about. For this purpose, a special Commission for Radio and Television Reform was appointed, operating within the Committee for Radio and Television Broadcasting. The Commission opted for far-reaching reform of the electronic media and the introduction of a division into three separate sectors, a structure that was popular in many Western countries: public, created by state owned stations; commercial, privately owned; and civic (social), based on stations that were created and run by political parties, social groups, religious organizations, ethnic minorities and local communities.

Major changes in electronic media resulted from the re-establishment of a legal basis on which Polish radio and television could operate. In December 1992, the Sejm passed "Ustawa o radiofonii i telewizji" ("The Radio and Television Act"), which led to the dissolution of the current, monopolistic structure of State Organizational Unit "Polish Radio and Television". It was replaced by joint stock company Telewizja Polska, established to create and broadcast three national television programmes and joint stock company Polskie Radio, formed to broadcast national radio programmes as well as programmes for listeners abroad. Also, regional radio and television bodies were formed; these new bodies were administered by management and supervisory boards [15, c. 51]. The Act also brought to life the National Broadcasting Council – the regulatory body whose task was safeguarding the freedom of speech of radio and television broadcasters and their autonomy, protecting the interests of the recipients and providing radio and television that was open and pluralistic in nature. The



most important National Broadcasting Council function became taking concession decisions i.e. the processing of license applications and issuing administrative acts authorising the conduct of terrestrial radio or television broadcasting.

"Ustawa o radiofonii i telewizji" ("The Radio and Television Act"), 1992, created a framework in which the Polish electronic media market could enjoy dynamic growth. Already in the first concession process, which took place in 1993 and 1994, the majority of broadcasters (operating illegally up until that point) obtained licenses to broadcast their programmes legally. The National Broadcasting Council granted concession for 3 nationwide radio broadcasters, 132 concessions for local broadcasters and 2 licenses for inter-regional networks. Only 1 television station obtained a nationwide licence, as well as 1 regional and 11 local stations. As a result of the first concession process, the nationwide radio activity was commenced by the first two commercial radio stations: RMF FM and Radio "Z" as well as one social radio station – Radio Maria, run by with the Catholic Church. Polish satellite TV "Polsat", the first commercial TV station, began to broadcast their programmes.

These phenomena and processes show that, in the first half of the 90s, the Polish media market underwent major changes primarily brought about by two processes that were fundamentally important to the state and society and also to communication as a whole: democratisation and de-monopolisation of the political and economic systems. Media studies conducted at that time indicated a great interest in the press, which translated clearly into a high volume of sales. Over time, newspapers were subjected to tough competition with rapidly developing and increasingly popular electronic media such as radio, television and the Internet. In addition, the media market succumbed to economic principles. Consequently, the only entities that survived were those capable of successful implementation of the tools of modern economics and up-to-date management strategies. The Polish market was then flooded with foreign capital. Foreign investors, armed with experience of free-market media in their home countries, impressed on Polish publishers and broadcasters that, in order for a media organisation to survive in the competitive environment, marketing tools needed to be implemented. Media, especially those derived from the previous political era, had to learn how to function in completely new and unknown free-market conditions. Some managed to adapt whilst others found it harder to cope with free-market dynamics; a number of titles (especially newspapers) that had been borne out of the transformation period and the ensuing enthusiasm caused by the collapse of authoritarian rule followed by the commencement of free market, were liquidated.

### **Media as a subject of democratic changes**

Following the changes of 1989, Polish media underwent profound transformations associated with the transition from the centralised model, typical for the Polish People's Republic, to a functional order, open, pluralistic and facilitating democracy. Mass communication had no other option but to adapt to the new system of social organisation. Media transformation was only part of a widely experienced process of democratisation, covering a range of areas within society and expressed through genuine recognition of civil and political rights on which the system transformation was based and new civil society developed [16, c. 12 – 19]. The phenomena and processes that occur within and constitute complex process of democratisation are closely inter-linked and determine one another. It is therefore crucial to identify the relationships involved in the process of media remodelling, in accordance with the directions outlined above, and other areas of social and political transformation. These changes on the one hand made it possible to unwind the stagnant and undemocratic mass media structure of the time whilst, on the other hand, they were largely initiated, directed and strengthened by the media fulfilling their role as active participants of the social stage. Therefore it might be held that mass media in the Eastern bloc countries after 1989 should be analysed as an object of the system transformation with the focus on changes in media law, de-monopolisation of the media sector, quantitative changes in the press, radio and tel-





evision market; the subjective role appears to be equally important in the democratisation process, transformation of the political scene etc. These two approaches co-exist.

Among a number of functions performed by a mass media defined by a common, albeit ambiguous, term "social functions", those associated with the mass media participation in the process of political socialisation can be separated. Most importantly those responsible for shaping the political consciousness of the citizens or - more broadly - the political culture of certain communities [17, c. 87 – 105]. Political socialisation, defined as a set of factors including both external influences of the social environment and those resulting from individual activity, leads to the consolidation of specific knowledge about the socio-political reality, existing attitudes and evaluations. This process, if conducted properly, will give some basis for the preparation of the individual to function in the field of politics with the ability to perform certain political roles [18, c. 161 – 162]. Political socialisation is crucial for the proper functioning of political systems as it enables, in combination with a number of other processes, its internal integration and stability. By facilitating certain opinions and assessments of the system and its identity, socialisation sanctions the system and enables the implementation of mechanisms and attitudes that accept the norms regulating and organising the system. According to Miroslaw Karwat, the process of political socialisation, controlled by the political system, is utilised to select its own systems of values, standards, evaluations and behavioural models, constantly referring to the sustainability of the political system. Such selection may be "positive" (i.e.. adapting the functional components of other systems), as well as negative, which takes the form of "a filter" of destructive influences [19, c. 115]. Political socialisation facilitates the legitimisation of the political system, as it helps to create attitudes that support its structures and rules. Content selection and therefore the adoption of a certain approach towards the political system requires the creation of certain qualities and skills that enable the proper evaluation of the political landscape. In the pre-1989 Eastern Block, the media played an important role in the process of political socialisation albeit as a tool used for ideological influence and not a source of reliable knowledge about politics and its mechanisms. Only the changes that occurred following the abolition of censorship and monopolisation of the media market enabled political socialisation to be conducted through the mass media in a democratic way. The process was carried out directly (by transferring ideologically diverse content including values, ideas and political standards), and indirectly (by creating conditions for institutionally and legally unfettered distribution of that content). The role of mass media as an important creator of attitudes, opinions, evaluations and knowledge of an individual on the issue of politics cannot be overestimated. The average citizen in a modern society spends approximately 3-5 hours a day receiving the mass media transmission; the third most time-consuming activity after work and sleep. The scope and the nature of mass media influence on an individual, signifying the importance of this "instrument" of political socialisation in shaping certain attitudes and evaluations, as well as absorbing political knowledge, is varied and depends on a number of factors related to the features of the message in itself and the features of its sender and recipient. The most important include the credibility of the message, recipient's personality and his social position in and situational conditions of reception [20, c. 142 – 144]. We therefore are discussing here the impact analysed and defined through the scope of its effects. These reflections seem to be necessary to derive the proper characteristics of the role of mass media in the process of democratisation. They enable the definition of main directions or areas of media influence on political awareness, which was necessary to support the reconstruction of the social and political system in Poland after 1989. The most important function of political socialisation during the transformation period seems to be shaping supportive attitudes towards the new socio-economic system. These attitudes should not be understood and defined as the effect of ideological indoctrination, but rather as a consequence of acquiring rationally supported, reliable and functional knowledge. According to Adam Frączek, the foundation that enables the creation of positive attitudes towards politics and the political system is therefore "having specific concepts regarding what elements of the social life and political processes pro-



mote economic progress and welfare of the people" [21, c. 4]. Empirical studies prove that there is a relationship between the clarification of certain ideas relating to political issues and the content transmitted and propagated by the mass media. The research by Judith Torney-Purta and Adam Frączak on political preferences and opinions of school-age teens regarding democratic changes in Poland after 1989 proves that the changes were evaluated more positively by people who formulated their socio-political opinions based on information transmitted by the media. Teens who watched TV programs with political and economic content were more appreciative of the changes than their peers who declared no interest in such issues as broadcast by the media [21, c. 4]. "It is rather obvious that young people will support the development and stabilisation of the democratic system if they have a wider and a more accurate knowledge of the pros and cons of such a system and the events and processes which constitute a threat to democracy. Secondly, they need to choose and reasonably support this system, in spite of being aware of its weaknesses [...]. Thirdly, if they mastered the procedures of existing in the democratic system well enough that they are capable of their effective application in tackling their own problems as well as problems of their community. This kind of knowledge, skills and behaviours cannot appear out of nowhere; they are absorbed with the basis of information obtained from the environment, including school education and through the media, but they are also formed as a result of the observations and practical experience of an individual. [...] It seems that the media - especially television - to some extent, at least in the case of some adolescents must perform the functions alternative to school education as regards political socialisation" - states A. Frączak [21, c. 4].

Many researchers point out the role of the media and political socialisation in the fall of communism in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it is through television images that a global audience learned about the events taking place in Poland, including the Round Table talks, the first non-communist government established by Tadeusz Mazowiecki in 1989, as well as in Hungary (the ousting of Karoly Grosz), Germany (citizens fleeing en masse from the regime of E. Honecker and seeking refuge in the FRG Embassy in Budapest) and Romania (Nicolae Ceaușescu's execution) [16, c. 15]. According to Samuel Huntington, the processes of political reconstruction in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe occurred following domino effect. Democratic changes in one country, led to similar events in another country – a succession of events created a linear order. Political transformation, which took place in the countries belonging to the sphere of Soviet influence, was largely determined by the media revolution of the late twentieth century. New communication technologies (satellite TV, fax, computer networks), allowed much faster transmission of information using a screen, managed to bypass officially controlled propaganda channels and facilitated the development of attitudes accepting and supporting the reconstruction of political reality as it was happening. As observed by Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska, thanks to the information obtained by the public from unofficial alternative sources, the perception of reality was changing and the resistance to currently existing non-democratic regimes grew.

The transformation of the media system in Poland resulted in the means of mass communication becoming the subject and not the instrument of political life. Media became somewhat autonomous. It became structurally independent from currently existing limiting economic, political or cultural obligations and began to fulfil the role which was supposed to fulfil in democratic society, with the main focus on their controlling functions. Public sphere became permanently supervised by the media; all the activities of institutions and organisations in that sphere opened to media operations which resulted in their democratisation, in line with the principle of public life transparency. After 1989 autonomous media actively engaged in creating the political reality. Thanks to mass media the behaviour of the participants of public and political life became transparent, subject to public evaluation, discussion and criticism. Political communication with this new type of media began to work both ways; media open to their recipients were not only a tool for transmitting the messages of ruling authorities but created channels for citizens to articulate their needs and interests, forums to

exchange views and conduct polemics on socio-political issues. Citizens gained new instruments of influence on participants of political life such as election surveys and opinion polls with unfettered access to their results, published in the media. Media activity contributed to the emergence of so-called catholic legitimacy, unknown to the Polish communist political system. Catholic legitimacy refers to the situation when a politician constantly seeks the support of the voters and focuses on his own image, trying to meet the expectations of the electorate. This led to a gradual professionalization of the new political elites.

### Conclusions

Media in Poland and in other Middle and Eastern European countries experienced a long and arduous journey from monopoly to pluralism, from authoritarianism to democracy, from striving to function beyond the straight-jacket of political propaganda to freedom of speech and relative independence. The word "relative" is fully justified here. Modern media still remain influenced by the political system and the market – the two areas which most significantly determine the nature and the directions of development. It is hardly surprising as the media are always involved to a lesser or greater degree in politics, despite their claims of independence; effectiveness of mass media depends on, amongst other things, the degree of their political and financial independence. This condition can therefore be considered as natural providing that the politics and the market do not create a dictate; media institutions may not be degraded to the role of the political loot of the winning political party or profit generator of profits for their owners and administrators, usually international media corporations with global position and influence. In Poland, unfortunately, it is not uncommon for newspapers, radio and especially television to play such a role. Paolo Mancini compares Polish media to the Italian system, pointing out many similarities: strong influence by the ruling party and instrumentalisation, symbiosis of politics, business and journalism and a low level of public trust in the law and authority. In this respect, Poland is closer to the Mediterranean model than to the model found in most countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The situation may have its roots in particular phenomena and processes occurring in the period of system transformation, determining the directions of further changes in the Polish media and their character as of today.

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## **MEDIA SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION IN POLAND AFTER 1989**

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The paper discusses the main processes and consequences of transformation of the media system of Poland in post-socialist period.

Key words: Poland, mass media, transition, authoritarianism, transformation, democracy.