

Agnieszka Stępińska\*

## Media Coverage of the Polish EU Presidency

**Abstract:** *The aim of this paper is to present the preliminary findings of the international comparative study on the media coverage of the 2011 Polish Presidency of the EU Council. The study was conducted in nine countries: Austria, Belgium, Greece, Estonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Sweden. In addition, the content of the television news station Euronews was analysed. The findings showed that the EU Presidency does not guarantee a high level of media interest everywhere. Nevertheless, it still may be perceived as an important factor in media coverage overall, as well as an opportunity for the country holding the Presidency to enhance its image.*

### Introduction

Media is widely considered to be the crucial source of knowledge about other countries for most people, thus it can be expected to have a highly significant impact in how we comprehend the world and communicate with people of different nationalities. In particular, because most people do not have personal knowledge of events in foreign countries, the agenda-setting effect of foreign news will loom larger than that of domestic counterparts.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, exposure to foreign news has an impact on attitudes and opinions concerning the foreign countries reported on.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in contemporary international relations, ‘image politics’ – that is, the ability of a country to project a prestigious or powerful image – is as much

---

\* **Agnieszka Stępińska**, Ph.D. – Assistant Professor, Faculty of Political Science and Journalism, University of Poznań.

<sup>1</sup> T.Hargrove, G.H. Stempel, *Exploring reader interest in international news*, “Newspaper Research Journal”, No. 4/2002, pp. 46–51; W. Wanta, G. Golan, C. Lee, *Agenda setting and international news: Media influence on public perceptions of foreign countries*, “Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly”, No. 2/2004, pp. 364–377.

<sup>2</sup> H.A. Semetko, J.B. Brzinski, D. Weaver, L. Willnat, *TV news and U.S. public opinion about international countries: The impact of exposure and attention*, “International Journal of Public Opinion Research”, No. 1/1992, pp. 18–36.

a part of a nation's foreign policy arsenal as political, economic, and military strength.<sup>3</sup> This means that all countries desire high-visibility, positive images in the media.<sup>4</sup> For this reason, today the public diplomacy of governments increasingly resembles corporate public relations strategies or global branding campaigns, designed to attract media attention and influence world public opinion in order to affect, *inter alia*, foreign governments, tourism, and corporate investment.<sup>5</sup> One of the common strategies of media management is to host an event that will attract positive media attention.

According to the model developed by Manheim, for those countries with a very low or a very high level of visibility and negative image valance, hosting a global media event may not be the best option. But cumulative events provide an opportunity for a gradual image enhancement.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, during the six-month period of the rotating EU Presidency the government of the country holding the Presidency attempts to attract foreign media attention, not only as a host of numerous meetings and events, but also as an actor-in-charge, able to at least call for some actions and solutions to the problems the EU is facing at that time. In fact, all of the government's behaviours: decisions, actions, initiatives or events, may be perceived as particular signals sent to international public opinion in order to influence that state's image.

Thus an effectively conducted Presidency of the EU Council may improve the image of the country holding this position. This is particularly true for countries that hold the chairmanship of the EU Council for the first time. In many cases, however, internal political events such as elections, political tensions, or controversies over domestic issues may take up the whole air time concerning the country.

---

<sup>3</sup> E. Gilboa, *Diplomacy in the Media Age: Three Models of Uses and Effects* in: *Diplomacy, III*, eds. C. Jonsson, R. Langhorne, London 2004, pp. 96–119; J. Nye, *Soft Power. The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York 2004; B. Ociepka, *Dyplomacja publiczna jako forma komunikowania międzynarodowego (Public Diplomacy as a Form of International Communication)* in: *Dyplomacja publiczna (Public Diplomacy)*, ed. B. Ociepka, Wrocław 2008; B. Ociepka, *Nowa dyplomacja publiczna – perspektywa teorii stosunków międzynarodowych i komunikowania politycznego (New Public Diplomacy: The Perspective of Theory of International Relations and Political Communication)*, "Przegląd Strategiczny" No. 1/2012, pp. 129–139.

<sup>4</sup> J.B. Manheim, *Strategic Public Diplomacy and American Foreign Policy: The Evolution of Influence*, New York 1994; M. Kunczik, *States, International Organizations, and the News Media* in: *Political Communication in a New Era*, eds. P.J. Maarek, G. Wolfsfeld, New York, 2003, pp. 117–138.

<sup>5</sup> B.H. Signitzer, T. Coombs, *Public Relations and Public Diplomacy Conceptual Convergences*, "Public Relations Review" No. 2/1992, pp. 137–147; N.K. Rivenburgh, *In pursuit of a global image: media events as political communication* in: *Media Events in a Global Age*, eds. N. Couldry, A. Hepp, F. Krotz, London–New York 2010, pp. 187–202.

<sup>6</sup> J.B. Manheim, op.cit.

The aim of this paper is to present the preliminary findings of the international comparative study on the media coverage of the Polish Presidency in the EU Council.<sup>7</sup> The study investigated: the frequency of coverage of Poland in the foreign media during the period of its EU Presidency; dominant frames and perspectives used in the materials; the sources of information presented in the media (journalist, foreign correspondent, news agencies, other media); particular topics (EU-related and non-EU related); major actors; as well as opinions expressed in the comments and analyses and identification of their authors.<sup>8</sup>

## 1. Theoretical background and previous studies

Foreign news has been a topic of research for a long time. Initial American studies date from the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>9</sup> J. Wilke's historical, long-term study on foreign news in German, French, English and American newspapers showed that there had been a steady growth in the amount of foreign news coverage across three centuries. The world views of the four countries studied were at that time heavily 'Euro-centered', and only later did they expand to take in other parts of the world.<sup>10</sup> The early empirical studies from the 1950s certified the significance of Europe in the media around the world and revealed a bias in foreign news coverage.<sup>11</sup> Two decades later, a study conducted by Gerbner and Marvanyi showed, once again, a difference between a 'real' map of the world with the maps of 'the worlds of news.' The findings of a content analysis of 60 newspapers from nine countries clearly showed that the 'necessarily arbitrary assumption that each region has equal chance

---

<sup>7</sup> The study was sponsored by the Polish National Science Center (grant no. N N116 614440).

<sup>8</sup> I wish to acknowledge and thank my project partners: Romy Wöhlert (Austria), Daniël Biltereyst, Stijn Joye, Khaël Velders, Thibault Bonte, and Eveline Delcart (Belgium), Dora Papadopoulou, Katerina Serafeim, Anastasia Deligiaouri, and Martha Katsiola (Greece), Andres Jõesaar (Estonia), Szymon Ossowski, Małgorzata Kołodziejczak, Ewa Jurga-Wosik, Bartłomiej Secler, Jacek Wyszynski, Magdalena Boniec (Poland), Rui Novais, Christina Ivanova, Aureliana Gomes, and Ana Carvalho (Portugal), Valentina Marinescu and Madalina Balasescu (Romania), Miguel Vicente-Mariño and Adolfo Carratalá (Spain), Andreas Widholm (Sweden).

<sup>9</sup> J.L. Woodward, *Foreign news in American morning newspapers. A study in public opinion*, New York 1930.

<sup>10</sup> J. Wilke, *Foreign news coverage and international news flow over three centuries*, "Gazette", No. 3/1987, pp. 147–180.

<sup>11</sup> J. Kayser, *One week's news. Comparative study of 17 major dailies for a seven-day period*, Paris: UNESCO 1953.

<sup>12</sup> G. Gerbner, G. Marvanyi, *The many worlds of the world's press*, "Journal of Communication", No. 1/1977, pp. 52–66.

of newsworthiness' could not be supported.<sup>12</sup> The same conclusion was drawn from other studies, including the study of the Norwegian newspapers' coverage of the conflicts in Cuba, Congo and Cyprus, conducted by J. Galtung and M. Ruge,<sup>13</sup> and the study 'Foreign Images' conducted under the supervision of the International Association for Mass Communication Research (IAMCR)<sup>14</sup>.

One major finding from the studies mentioned above was that throughout the world foreign news '*devoted most attention to events happening within and to actors belonging to its immediate geographical region.*'<sup>15</sup> The concept of regionalism seems to be supported also by more recent international media content studies. For example, J. Wilke and C. Heimprecht showed that in five European countries included in the project 'Foreign News on TV',<sup>16</sup> almost half of the foreign news items presented (49 percent) on TV newscasts were devoted to events in Europe, while the numbers in other regions were significantly lower: in Asia one third of the items presented (32 percent) covered European issues, in South America, 23 percent, and in the Near East, 22 percent, while in North America only 17 percent of foreign news items were devoted to events in Europe.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, the level of interest in their own region was relatively higher.

In second place in terms of coverage were super powers, and in third place regions with on-going crises. And only afterwards did there remain a small amount of space, if any, for coverage of events in smaller and less important countries. Therefore, the global-level research on international news flow generally assumes that international news coverage reflects the alignment of power among nations. The crafting of media messages, including those focused on international events, however, is also subject to local influences. Included are organizational factors and the local community's power structure and corporate characteristics. These influences are likely to affect not only the type of foreign news that appears in the media, but also the quality and depth of the coverage.

---

<sup>13</sup> J. Galtung, M. Ruge, *The structure of foreign news: The presentation of the Congo, Cuba and Cyprus crises in four Norwegian newspapers*, "Journal of Peace Research", No. 1/1965, pp.64–91.

<sup>14</sup> A. Sreberny-Mohammadi, K. Nordenstreng, R. Stevenson, F. Ugboajah, *Foreign news in the media: International reporting in 29 countries*, Paris: UNESCO 1985.

<sup>15</sup> A. Sreberny-Mohammadi, *The "world of the news" study*, "Journal of Communication", No. 1/1984, p. 121.

<sup>16</sup> The project was carried out between 2007 and 2012 in 17 countries, including five European ones: Belgium, Germany, Italy, Poland, Portugal and Switzerland.

<sup>17</sup> J. Wilke, C. Heimprecht, *Europe in Europe and Europe in the world in: News in Europe, Europe on news*, ed. A. Stepińska, Berlin 2011, pp. 85–98.

The classic concept of foreign news value, developed by J. Galtung and M. Ruge,<sup>18</sup> includes twelve factors that influence whether an event will become a news item: short duration, reference to elite nations, reference to elite persons, surprise, intensity, relevance, negativity, personification, continuity, importance, obviousness, and complementary character. In general, this theory purports that the economic, social, political, and geographic characteristics of a nation determine the amount of coverage any one country receives in the press of another.

Subsequent studies have sought to map the features and factors that render an event newsworthy. The content – based studies show that variation in the amount of foreign news is correlated with political systems and economic development.<sup>19</sup> In particular, according to Wu's results from a meta-analysis of 55 studies investigating the determinants of international news flow (mostly from 1980s and 1990s), among the components embedded in the world structure one may distinguish between a few major categories of factors, namely: economic status, political status, technological development, and cultural and geographical proximity. In particular, these categories include the following factors: GNP per capita, index of economic development, population or size of a nation, cultural proximity, former colonial ties, ideological groupings, language factor, geographic proximity, elite status, media facilities and equipment, communication access and technologies, and international news service(s).<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, P.J. Shoemaker and A.A. Cohen distinguished between four dimensions that explain a foreign event's significance to a particular culture or society and the media. These are:

- 1) the political significance (the extent to which the content of a news item has potential or actual impact on the relationship between people and government or between governments);
- 2) the economic significance (the extent to which the content of the news item has potential or actual impact on the exchange of goods and services, including the monetary system, business, tariffs, labour, transportation, job markets, natural resources, and infrastructure);
- 3) cultural significance (the extent to which the content of a news item has potential or actual impact on the traditions, institutions, and norms of a given social system); and

---

<sup>18</sup> J. Galtung, M. Ruge, op.cit.

<sup>19</sup> T.K. Chang, J.W. Lee, *Factors affecting gatekeepers' selection of foreign news: A national survey of newspaper editors*, "Journalism Quarterly", No. 3/1992, pp. 554–561; H.D. Wu, *Systemic determinants of international news coverage: A comparison of 38 countries*, "Journal of Communication", No. 2/2000, pp. 110–130.

<sup>20</sup> H.D. Wu, *Investigating the determinants of international news flow. A meta-analysis*, "Gazette", No. 6/1998, pp. 493–512.

- 4) public significance (the enhancements or threats a news item represents for the public's well – being). The general assumption here is that a news item rating as highly intense on all four dimensions of social significance will receive more news coverage in that specific culture than a news item of lower intensity.<sup>21</sup>

Based on the concepts mentioned above, we can make certain assumptions about the attention paid by various news media to events in foreign countries. The amount of news coverage depends on the proximity (or distance) between the countries, and on their ethnographic, political, or economic relations. We assume that the smaller distance is, the more comprehensive and complex is the picture of that country in the media (more topics and events covered by the news media). On the contrary, if the distance must be compensated for by other news factors, this might favour a preference for some particular topics, including conflicts and violence. Considering the formats of presentation, European countries will be covered prominently in Europe, but the actual amount of news coverage will depend on the attributes and roles played by the country within the region.

Numerous content media studies have been conducted within the European context in previous decades. While some of them were devoted to analysing the media coverage of major European events, others aimed at studying the contribution of the press to the Europeanization of the public sphere. For example, C. de Vreese examined the news agenda and the role played by national news organizations in three countries (Great Britain, Denmark, and the Netherlands) in covering the January 1999 first-step introduction of the euro, the June 1999 European Parliamentary elections, and the December 2000 summit in Nice.<sup>22</sup> The findings showed that the news coverage of European affairs is cyclical, peaking during the events but hardly visible before and after. Furthermore, news organizations differed not only in terms of attention devoted to these events, but also in their editorial policies and the degree of effort invested in covering the events.

Among the EU-related events, the European Parliamentary elections seem to attract regular media attention. The media coverage of these elections has

---

<sup>21</sup> P.J. Shoemaker, A.A. Cohen, *News around the world: Content, practitioners, and the public*, London 2006.

<sup>22</sup> C.H. de Vreese, *Europe in the News: A cross-national comparative study of the news coverage of key EU events*, "European Union Politics", No. 2/ 2001, pp. 283–307; C. H. de Vreese, J. Peter, H.A. Semetko, *Framing politics at the launch of the euro: A cross-national comparative study of frames in the news*, "Political Communication", No. 2/2001, pp. 107–122; C.H. de Vreese, *Frames in Television News: British, Danish, and Dutch Television News Coverage of the Introduction of the Euro in: News in a globalized society*, ed. S. Hjarvard, Gothenburg 2001, pp. 179–196.

been the subject of interest of many scholars, including J. Wilke<sup>23</sup>, M. Maier, J. Strömbäck, and L.L. Kaid<sup>24</sup>, and C. de Vreese<sup>25</sup>. At the same time, much scholarship has examined the media coverage of the European referendum campaigns.<sup>26</sup> A separate segment of media research within the EU context is devoted to an examination of the role of the media in the process of European integration<sup>27</sup> and further EU enlargement<sup>28</sup>.

Studies of the content analysis of the European media led eventually to research into a concept of Europeanization of the media and public sphere.<sup>29</sup> In the late 1990s and early 2000s numerous projects were devoted to this

---

<sup>23</sup> J. Wilke, C. Reinemann, *Invisible second-order campaigns? A longitudinal study of the coverage of the European Parliamentary elections 1979-2004 in four German quality newspapers*, "Communications", No. 32/2007, pp. 299–322.

<sup>24</sup> M. Maier, J. Strömbäck, L.L. Kaid, *European Political Communication: Campaign Strategies, Media Coverage, and Campaign Effects in European Parliamentary Elections*, Farnham 2012; J. Tenscher, M. Maier, *Special Issue: European Parliamentary Elections 2004*, "Journal of Political Marketing", No. 1/2009; M. Maier, J. Tenscher, *Campaigning in Europe – campaigning for Europe: Political parties, campaigns, mass media and the European Parliament Elections 2004*, Münster 2006; J. Strömbäck, M. Maier, M. Müller, D. Hopmann, J.C. Nicolas, R. Berganza, et al., *The Mediatization and Framing of European Parliamentary Election Campaigns in: European Political Communication...* op.cit.; M. Maier, J. Maier, *News coverage of EU Parliamentary elections in: The handbook of election news coverage around the world*, eds. J. Strömbäck, L.L. Kaid, New York 2008, pp. 403–420.

<sup>25</sup> C.H. de Vreese, *Election coverage – new directions for public broadcasting: The Netherlands and beyond*, "European Journal of Communication", No. 2/2001, pp. 155–179.

<sup>26</sup> C.H. de Vreese, H.A. Semetko, *Political campaigning in referendums: Framing the referendum issue*, London 2004; C.H. de Vreese, H. Boomgaarden, *Projecting EU referendums: Fear of immigration and support for European integration*, "European Union Politics", No. 1/2005, pp. 59–82.

<sup>27</sup> C.H. de Vreese, H.A. Semetko, *Cynical and engaged: strategic campaign coverage, public opinion and mobilization in a referendum*, "Communication Research", No. 6/2002, pp. 615–641; C.H. de Vreese, H.A. Semetko, *News Matters: Influences on the vote in a referendum campaign*, "European Journal of Political Research", No. 5/2004, pp. 699–722; J. Peter, C.H. de Vreese, *In search of Europe – A cross-national comparative study of the European Union in national television news*, "Harvard Journal of Press/ Politics", No. 4/2004; H. Boomgaarden, R. Vliegenthart, A. Schuck, C.H. de Vreese, *News on the move: Exogenous events and news coverage of the European Union*, "Journal of European Public Policy", No. 4/2010, pp. 506–526.

<sup>28</sup> R. Azrout, J. van Spanje, C.H. de Vreese, *When news matters: Media effects on public support for EU enlargement in 21 countries*, "Journal of Common Market Studies" (in press); C.H. de Vreese, W. van der Brug, S. Hobolt, *Turkey in the EU: How cultural and economic frames affect support for Turkish membership*, "Comparative European Politics" (in press).

<sup>29</sup> B. Pfetsch, A. Silke, B. Eschner, *The contribution of the press to Europeanization of public debates. A comparative study of issue salience and conflict lines of European integration*, "Journalism", No. 4/2008, pp. 465–492; S. Lingenberg, *The Citizen Audience and European Trans-cultural Public Spheres: Exploring Civic Engagement in European Political Communication*, "Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research", No. 1/2010, pp. 47–74.

area of study, including: DFG Project on ‘The Transnationalization of Public Spheres in Europe: Citizens’ (re)actions’ conducted by scholars at the University of Bremen; the Project ‘Changing Media and the Formation of a European Public Sphere’ (University of Vienna); and the international project ‘The Transformation of Political Mobilization and Communication in European Public Spheres’, coordinated by the Wissenschaftszentrum in Berlin.<sup>30</sup>

The findings of these projects reveal a process of transnationalization of public spheres. This process, however, remains segmented according to nations as well as to transnational newspaper types.<sup>31</sup> They also show that ‘the more a country is integrated into the European Union, the less parochial is its press and the more and stronger it takes part in common European debates. Compared to these political settings, the influence of specific press formats seems to play a secondary role’.<sup>32</sup>

While much scholarship has been focused either on short-duration events or media and public opinion and the process of the EU integration, less attention has been given to a single country’s performance during the EU Presidency. Previous studies devoted to this topic were exclusively national in the scope.<sup>33</sup> This study provides an original contribution to the research on media coverage of EU-related events, based on the collection of data from seven countries. The Polish EU Presidency could be perceived as a case study in the examination of foreign media coverage of the country holding the leading position within the EU Council. In particular, the study provides an opportunity to analyse the image of a country that holds this position for the very first time.

Before Poland’s accession to the EU in 2004, several studies were conducted on the foreign media coverage of the country. Their findings revealed

---

<sup>30</sup> For a list of the most recent projects related to that topic, please check: <http://www.zemki.uni-bremen.de/en/research/third-party-funds/dfg-project-public-spheres-in-europe/research-on-public-spheres-in-europe.html#c667>

<sup>31</sup> M.Brüggemann, K.Kleinen-von Königslöw, *Let’s Talk About Europe. Why Europeanization Shows a Different Face in Different Newspapers*, “European Journal of Communication”, No. 1/2009, pp. 27–48; B.Peters, S. Sift, M. Brüggemann, K. Kleinen-von Königslöw, A. Wimmel, *National and Transnational Public Spheres: The Case of the EU*, “European Review”, No. 1/2005, pp. 139–160.

<sup>32</sup> H. Wessler, M. Skorek, K. Kleinen-von Königslöw, M. Held, M. Dobрева, M. Adolphsen, *Comparing Media Systems and Media Content: Online Newspapers in Ten Eastern and Western European Countries*, “Journal of Global Mass Communication”, No. 3/4/2008, pp. 165–189.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example: M. Ekengren, *National Foreign Policy Co-ordination: The Swedish EU Presidency in Contemporary European Foreign Policy*, eds. W.Carlsnaes, H.Sjursen, B.White, London 2004, pp. 211–226; L. Quaglia, E. Moxon-Browne, *What Makes a Good EU Presidency? Italy and Ireland Compared*, “Journal of Common Market Studies”, No. 2/2006, pp. 349–368.

a low visibility and recognition, as well as a rather neutral or negative image of Poland in other European countries.<sup>34</sup> In the early 2000s, 50–70 per cent of respondents in six countries (Austria, France, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, and Sweden) seemed to have no opinion about Poland at all at that time.<sup>35</sup> Among those who expressed any opinion, only around 10 per cent believed in the existence of a market orientation in the Polish economy, and only one third of Austrians and Germans perceived the Polish parliamentary system as ‘similar to the system developed in Western Europe’.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, findings from the media content analysis revealed that Poland was portrayed in news media mostly as a ‘peripheral, traditional catholic country with an underdeveloped economy’.<sup>37</sup> In general, Poland was presented as a country ‘dissimilar to the EU Members’.<sup>38</sup> The studies mentioned above also showed an inconsistency in the amount of the press coverage: while news media in Germany paid the most attention to Poland in late 1990s and early 2000s, in Spain and Sweden the coverage of Poland was rather limited.

Being aware of these facts, the government employed several programs of structural image management aiming at enhancing its image, including the National Promotion Strategy and Program of National Marketing. The marketing strategy included numerous cultural events (film and music festivals, art exhibitions and theatre performances framed as the ‘Polish Year’, participation in well recognised cultural events such as the Book Fairs in Frankfurt or ‘Europalia 2001’ in Brussels), international economic fairs and political meetings and conferences.<sup>39</sup> The extensive promotion and attention paid to spreading the positive message about Poland resulted in an increase in the number of publications in the foreign media and an improvement in the country’s image.<sup>40</sup>

A more recent study of the content of TV newscasts in 17 countries (the ‘Foreign News on TV project’) showed, however, that only 53 out of 16,962 items (0.2%) coded in 16 countries (Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, China,

---

<sup>34</sup> *Obraz Polski i Polaków w Europie (Image of Poland and Poles in Europe)*, ed. L. Kolarzka-Bobińska, Warszawa 2003; *Wizerunek Polski w prasie krajów Unii Europejskiej (Image of Poland in press in EU countries)*, ed. M. Warchala, Warszawa 2002; M. Sikorska, *Polska – Austria. Wzajemny wizerunek w okresie rozszerzania Unii Europejskiej (Poland – Austria, Mutual perceptions in the period of the EU enlargement)*, Warszawa 2000.

<sup>35</sup> *Obraz Polski i Polaków w Europie*, op.cit.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> *Wizerunek Polski w prasie krajów Unii Europejskiej*, op. cit.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>39</sup> M. Ryniewska-Kiełdanowicz, *Kształtowanie wizerunku Polski w Unii Europejskiej (Poland’s image management in the EU)* in: *Kształtowanie wizerunku (Image management)*, ed. B. Ociepka, Wrocław 2005.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

Egypt, Germany, Hong Kong, Israel, Italy, Japan, Portugal, Singapore, Switzerland, Taiwan, and the US) were dedicated to any event that took place in Poland, or in which the country was involved. Again, the country with the highest number of items about Poland on TV newscasts was Germany (11), followed by Belgium (9) and Switzerland (7).

## **2. Our study**

The project ‘Media Coverage of the Polish EU Presidency’ was designed to analyse how the Polish Presidency in the EU Council would be covered and interpreted by the news media in Poland and other European countries. In particular, the content analysis addressed the following research questions:

*RQ1: How many news items published in the news media during the period of the Polish EU Presidency were **actually referring** to that event?*

The project provided an opportunity to check how many items in the news media outside Poland were devoted to Poland and how many of them were inspired by the topic of Poland’s EU Presidency. In other words, we aimed to recognise the actual, not just potential, power of the Presidency in attracting media attention.

*RQ2: What topics were covered by the news media?*

As the studies on agenda-setting show, by focusing the attention on some particular events and topics, the media may influence the public perception of the object, in this case – the country.<sup>41</sup> Besides investigating items related to the Presidency, we examined all the items about Poland published during the six-month period of Poland’s hosting this position. This allowed us to recognise the picture of the country that was drawn by the foreign media and compare it with the image of the Presidency in the Polish media.

*RQ3: How was Poland introduced and portrayed in the items?*

One of the variables in the codebook was designed to recognise the main role in which Poland was presented in those news items relating to the Polish EU Presidency. We assumed that Poland might have been introduced either by its EU membership (EU Member, *new* EU Member, host or venue of the event) or by historical and geographic features (post-communist country, Central European country).

---

<sup>41</sup> M. McCombs, *Setting the agenda. The mass media and public opinions*, Cambridge 2006; W. Wanta, G. Golan, Ch. Lee, *Agenda setting and international news: media influence on public perceptions of foreign nations*, “Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly”, No. 1/2004, p. 364–77; W. Wanta, S. Mikusova, *The agenda – setting process in international news*, “Central European Journal of Communication”, No. 5/2010, pp. 221–235.

*RQ4: What was the dominant attitude towards Poland presented in the news?*

The final variable in the codebook was designed to learn how the news media evaluated the way Poland conducted the Presidency. This evaluation was mainly carried out in reliance on opinion articles. For news items it was only coded when a clear, explicit evaluation was noted in a particular article.

The study included nine countries: Austria, Belgium, Greece, Estonia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and Sweden. The findings presented in this paper, however, will come from seven countries, including Poland (the data from Portugal and Sweden is not accessible yet). A systematic selection of countries is unquestionably crucial for a comparative study. Since we were interested in European countries as our units of analysis, we followed the principle of including countries from different regions of Europe.

The call for cooperation was announced among the members of two international organizations, namely the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECEA), and the International Communication Association (ICA). Scholars from 15 countries responded to the call. During the course of the research process however, six countries eventually ended their participation for financial and logistical reasons.<sup>42</sup> These countries were Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark, Hungary, and Slovakia. Nevertheless, the final selection of the countries still included the Western, Southern, Northern, and Eastern regions of the European Union, thus the country selection was not biased toward any particular region. Moreover, the sample includes both countries with a long tradition of the EU membership as well as relatively new EU members. However, the limited number and content of the sample countries may affect the findings, particularly since the most eurosceptic countries (such as Great Britain) were not included. Taking this shortcoming into consideration this paper will focus more on a country-by-country analysis and avoid over-generalization of the findings.

Alongside with national media organizations' coverage, the content of the international TV news station *Euronews* was analysed. Since its launch in 1993, *Euronews* has been extending its scope and program coverage, while at the same time emphasizing its European character. According to the distribution report published in July 2008 (Euronews 2008), *Euronews* was a leading international news channel in Europe with a daily reach of 6.6 million viewers (2.9 million by satellite and cable and 3.7 million by landline network) which is more than CNNI (1.7 million) and BBC World (1.2 million) combined. Also, according to the European Media and

---

<sup>42</sup> The project was partly sponsored by the Polish National Science Center, but each team had to cover the costs of collecting and coding the data.

Marketing Survey (EMS, July 2008) on the European markets (20 countries), *Euronews* is one of the most popular international TV news channels with a weekly reach of 17.6%, once again more than CNNI (16.7%) and BBC World (12.4%).

On the other hand, *Euronews* was created as a competitor of CNN, in order to block its growing influence on the European television news market. This defensive strategy is still one of the fundamental philosophical guidelines behind *Euronews* and affects both the format and the content, which might be briefly described as 'reporting world news from a European perspective'. The station is produced by the operating subsidiary company SOCIEMIE, created by a consortium of public service shareholders from the European and Mediterranean Area (SECEMIE)<sup>43</sup> and sponsored extensively by European Commission grants.<sup>44</sup> Considering its features, *Euronews* may be considered as an important channel of information about Europe and the European Union for the international audience.

The empirical analysis is focused on the Polish EU Presidency, which started on 1 July 2011 and ended on 31 December 2011. Thus, we decided to gather data from 15 June 2011 until 15 January 2012 in three 6 week-periods: 15 June – 30 July, 1 September – 15 October, 1 December – 15 January.<sup>45</sup> Journalistic materials (news items, comments, reports, editorials, etc.) published during these periods were selected for the study by using 'Poland' as a keyword. Next, within the collected items, a sub-category of the sample was created by using the 'EU Presidency' as a keyword. As a result, we accessed two kinds of stories: 1) related to Poland (in general), and 2) related directly to the topic of Poland holding the Presidency of the EU Council.

The choice of media organizations was based on the following pattern: (1) each team was expected to analyse the content of at least one or two national daily newspapers, one popular/tabloid newspaper, and one weekly

---

<sup>43</sup> Since 1993 it has increased its shareholding to a total of 21 national TV networks from the following countries: Algeria, Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Egypt, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Ireland, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Spain, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tunisia, Ukraine.

<sup>44</sup> *Euronews* has been awarded grants from European Commission. For example, in 2002, *Euronews* received about 83.000 Euro for a program 'Proximo' and in 2004 the channel received an almost 3 million Euro grant for preparing and broadcasting messages focused on the issues related to the EU. *Euronews* also received money for developing its website and covering the European elections in 2004.

<sup>45</sup> Due to the fact that not all national teams followed this pattern, the actual numbers might be confusing. In order to avoid any bias we will use percentage as a method of presenting the findings.

magazine;<sup>46</sup> (2) the research team recorded newscasts that were broadcast across the respective country: the main newscast of the country's public service broadcasting station and the most popular newscasts of a privately owned (commercial) station, based on viewership ratings; (3) online media were selected based on their popularity, measured by the number of users. Table 1 below presents the sample that emerged.

The first stage in preparing the content analysis was development of the codebook. The codebook was prepared in English, the common language used by all the participants in the project. The final draft of the codebook was distributed to all the participating researchers and additional comments and suggestions were solicited. The final version was confirmed during a seminar that took place in Poznan in March 2012. The codebook included 16 variables, including date of publication, news media, genres, front page position of the item, size of the item, visual elements, source of information, author of opinion, one dominant topic area and/or particular topics (up to three), strategies of domestication, roles of Poland and attitude towards Poland.

**Table 1. Sample**

Country	Media organizations	Period of analysis	Items about Poland (total number)	Items about Polish EU Presidency (%)
Austria	Der Standard, Die Presse, Kronenzeitung, Profil.	15.06.–31.07.2011 01.09.–15.10.2011 01.12.2011–15.01.2012	795	7.2
Belgium	De Morgen, De Standaard, Het Laatste Nieuws, Knack, Het Nieuwsblad, De Tijd, Het Belang van Limburg, Gazet van Atwerpen.	15.06.2011–17.01.2012	735	1.6
Estonia	delfi.ee epl.ee postimees.ee err.ee	15.06.2011–15.01.2012	1099	3.5

<sup>46</sup> Again, not all national teams followed this pattern. For example, in Belgium the sample consisted of only one quality newspaper, one popular newspaper, and one weekly magazine, while in Greece as many as 9 online news organizations were studied and only 2 traditional printed newspapers. Thus, while presenting the findings we will spread the data into separate lines for different types of media.

Country	Media organizations	Period of analysis	Items about Poland (total number)	Items about Polish EU Presidency (%)
Greece	<i>Online media:</i> newsit.gr newsbomb.gr <i>Online newspapers:</i> tovima.gr avgi.gr eleftherotypia.gr	15.06.2011-30.01.2012 15.06.2011-15.01.2012 15.06.2011-15.01.2012 01.07-31.12.2011 01.07-31.12.2011 01.07-31.12.2011 15.06.2011-30.01.2012 15.06.2011-15.01.2012 15.06.2011-15.01.2012	122	46.7
	<i>Weekly newspapers:</i> Kiriakatiki, Eleftherotipia, To Vima.	15.06.2011-18.12.2011 15.06.2011-15.01.2012	56	23.6
	<i>Television</i> <sup>47</sup> : SKAI Television NET	15.06.2011-15.01.2012 15.06.2011-30.01.2012	14	42.9
Poland <sup>48</sup>	Gazeta Wyborcza, Rzeczpospolita, Fakt, Nasz Dziennik, Polityka, Wprost, Uwazam rze.	15.06.-31.07.2011 01.09.-15.10.2011 01.12.2011-15.01.2012	767 (100)	
Romania	<i>Newspapers:</i> Jurnalul National Adevarul, Romania Libera,, Libertatea, Revista 22.	1.06.2011-15.01.2012	1668	15.7
	<i>Online:</i> Hotnews, Ziare.com, Euractiv.		1047	36.2
Spain <sup>49</sup>	El Pais	15.06.-31.12.2012	41	36.6
Euronews		30.03.2011- 30.01.2012	71	22

The project was coordinated from the Faculty of Political Science and Journalism at the University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznan, Poland. Each team was in charge of training its coders. Reliability among the coders was established as a precondition for going ahead with the coding of the

<sup>47</sup> In case of the Greek sample data from the study of content of TV newscasts is still missing.

<sup>48</sup> In case of the Polish sample all coded items were related to the Polish EU Presidency.

<sup>49</sup> In case of the Spain some sample data is still missing (El Mundo, La Vanguardia – online version, and El Punt / Avui- online version).

items.<sup>50</sup> Since the project is still on-going, it should be underscored that this paper presents only preliminary findings from the quantitative stage of the study. The following section provides information about the frequency of the media coverage of topics related to Poland and to the Polish EU Presidency, the main topics through which Poland was presented in 2011, the main roles in which the country was portrayed, and the attitude towards Poland as the chairing country.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. Frequency of media coverage

Table 1 presents not only the sample but also data on the frequency of news media coverage of the Polish Presidency in the European Union Council between 1 July and 31 December 2011 in the news media in seven countries and on *Euronews*. Since there were some differences in the number of news organizations studied and periods of analysis in the countries participating in the project, it may be expected that the number of items would differ across the countries. Hence, the data presented in the Table 1 is divided into groups by country and type of news media.

The findings show that there was no clear pattern across the countries in terms of the amount of media coverage of Poland and the Polish EU Presidency. On the one hand, there were countries with relatively high number of items about Poland (in general) and a very limited coverage of the Polish EU Presidency. In Austria 7.2 per cent of the items devoted to Poland covered the topic of Presidency, while in Belgium and Estonia the percentage was only 1.6 and 3.5 per cent respectively. On the other hand, there were countries where some media seemed to be highly interested in that topic. The news organizations with the highest percentage of items devoted to the Polish Presidency were online media (46.7 per cent), TV newscasts in Greece (42.9 per cent), online media in Romania (36.2 per cent), and one of the high quality newspapers in Spain – ‘El Pais’ (36.6 per cent). At the same time, in weekly magazines in Greece and in the online version of the TV news station *Euronews* slightly more than every fifth item devoted to Poland was devoted to the topic of the Polish Presidency (23.6 and 22 per cent, respectively).

---

<sup>50</sup> The number of coders varied from two in Belgium to six in Poland. Although we received information from most of the teams that they did intercoder reliability tests, at this stage of the project we are not able to provide the actual level of reliability of coding for each country. In Austria, for example, the data was coded by three coders and coefficients for the coded variables ranked between 0.956 and 0.711. See: R. Wöhlert, *Media Coverage of the EU Presidency. A cross-national comparative analysis*, Country summary report: Austria, p. 3.

These findings lead to a conclusion that the EU Presidency may be perceived as an important factor in the media coverage in some countries, although it does not guarantee a high level of media interest everywhere. Still, it is worth mentioning that *Euronews* – an international TV news station, covering events from all around the world – paid a relatively high degree of attention to Poland’s chairmanship of the European Union Council.

### 3.2. Main topics

The project ‘Media Coverage of the EU Presidency’ was primarily designed to study the way foreign news media portrayed Poland as a chairing country in the European Union Council. Nevertheless, it also provided an opportunity to learn through which other topics Poland was presented in the news media outside the country. Table 2 below collects the data on the main topics covered in the news items related to Poland.

**Table 2. Main topics in the news items related to Poland (in %)**

Country	International politics	Economy	Culture	Sport	Internal	Human politics	Social interests	Justice relations and crime	Other
Austria (n=795)	17.1	15.3	14.1	29.6	7	3.9	5.8	3	4.2
Belgium (n=735)	2.9	10.9	12.4	38.8	1.5	5.4	4.2	15.5	8.4
Estonia (online) n=1099	7.3	17.4	4.5	45.8	3.6	2.0	3.7	4.4	11.3
Greece (newspapers) n=56	0	70.2	0	0	22.8	0	0	5.3	1.8
Greece (online) n=122	38.5	16.4	3.3	4.9	19.7	0.8	1.6	3.3	11.4
Romania (newspapers) n=1668	16.2	20.7	14.2	21	7.1	4.8	4.3	3.9	7.8
Romania (online) n=1047	16.2	25.9	10.7	12.4	12.2	3.4	5.7	3.7	9.8
Spain n=41	24.4	46.3	2.4	0	17.1	2.4	0	0	7.4
Poland n=767	34.8	15.8	16.7	0.3	21.8	2.2	2.6	1.4	4.4
<i>Euronews</i> n=71	10	15	8	24	6	10			16*

\* In the case of *Euronews* this category relates directly to the items covering the Polish EU Presidency

Source: Media Coverage of the Polish EU Presidency Project

The Presidency of the EU Council was not the only major event of 2011 in Poland. During the same six month-period the Polish Parliamentary elections took place. Furthermore, the UEFA Football Championships EURO2012, which Poland was to co-host along with Ukraine, was only a year away at the time Polish EU Presidency started. Hence, it could be expected that the foreign media coverage would be dominated by the topics of internal politics and sport. However, the term of the Polish Presidency passed without any serious internal political disturbances affecting the Presidency (including the Parliamentary campaign and elections), and consequently the foreign media showed only a moderate interest in this area. The countries with the highest scores on that matter were Greece (both online and printed media) and 'El Pais' in Spain. Interestingly, almost 22 per cent of the Polish sample (where all coded items were devoted to the topic of the EU Presidency) covered internal politics (mostly, tensions between the government and the political opposition).

It was EURO2012 that actually stole the most media attention.<sup>51</sup> For example, in the Estonian online media as many as 45.8 per cent of the items devoted to Poland covered some sports-related events. The numbers were only slightly smaller in Belgium and Austria (38.8 and 29.6 per cent, respectively). Even on *Euronews* sport was the number one topic among all items related to Poland: 24 per cent of the news covered Poland's progress in preparing the host cities for the football championships.

Nevertheless, the topics which dominated the media coverage of Poland in 2011 across all the samples were the economy and international politics. Considering the intensity of the economic crisis, it is not surprising to find that as many as 70 per cent of all news items in the printed media in Greece and almost 50 per cent of the news published in Spanish 'El Pais' were devoted to economic issues. At the same time, more than 20 per cent of the items in Romanian media (both online and printed) focused on the economy. In fact, there was no country in the sample where the topic of the economic crisis of 2011 was covered in less than 10 per cent of the news items.

At the same time, the dominant topic of international relations (which included the Polish EU Presidency as a particular topic) seemed to be of high importance for the Greek online news media (38.5 per cent) and 'El Pais' (24.4 per cent). This topic was the major frame used by the Polish media while covering the EU Presidency (34.8 per cent of the items devoted to the Presidency).

---

<sup>51</sup> The codebook included one variable to code a dominant category of topic (in this case, sport), and one variable to code up to three particular topics. One of them was 'championships'. We asked the coders to make a note if the item was devoted to EURO2012.

It is also worth mentioning that the Polish cultural program designed for the EU Presidency term succeeded in attracting the attention of foreign media. The printed press in Austria, Belgium and Romania devoted just slightly fewer news items to that topic than the Polish newspapers did. The other topics, such as crime and justice or ‘soft news’ focused on human interests (food, fashion, tourism) attracted rather little attention on the part of foreign journalists.

### **3.3. Main roles of Poland**

This was Poland’s first term in the role of Presidency in the EU Council. One of the principles of the project was to recognise how Poland was perceived and portrayed by the foreign news media in relation to this aspect. We assumed that Poland might have been introduced either by its EU membership or by historical and geographic features. The findings presented in Table 3 show that eight years after Poland’s EU accession, the country is perceived mostly as an EU Member (and not any more as a ‘new’ EU Member) in all the countries in the sample. The other roles, including those related to the meetings and events organised during the term of Presidency (host and venue) were used more often by the Polish media than foreign ones.

**Table 3. Main roles of Poland in news items related to the Polish EU Presidency (in %)**

Country	EU Member	New EU Member	Host	Venue	Post-communist	Central European country	Other
Austria	89.5	3.5	3.5	0	0	0	3.5
Belgium	58.3	0	16.7	0	0	0	25
Estonia (online)	79.5	0	10.3	2.6	2.6	0	5.1
Greece (newspapers)	30.8	7.7	38.5	7.7	7.7	0	7.7
Greece (online)	89.3	0	8.9	0	0	0	1.8
Romania (newspapers)	38.5	2.2	5.4	6.1	24.6	0	10.6
Romania (online)	59.9	9.2	13.1	8.2	1.5	0	8.2
Spain	66.7	0	6.7	13.3	6.7	0	6.7
Poland	55.6	2.4	19.3	9.2	1.4	1.1	11.3
Euronews	62.5	18.8	0	0	18.7	0	0

Source: Media Coverage of the Polish EU Presidency Project

Interestingly, the geographic (Central European country) and historical (post-communist country) labels were also hardly ever used when intro-

ducing or describing Poland. The exceptions to this rule were Romanian printed newspapers (which recalled Poland's past political experience in 24.6 per cent of the items related to the EU Presidency) and *Euronews*. In the case of the Romanian media it could be interpreted as one of strategies of domestication, i.e. Romanian journalists might have emphasised a historical background shared by Poland and Romania to make its foreign news more relevant to domestic readers. In case of *Euronews* however, introducing Poland as a 'new EU member' (in 18.8 per cent of the items) and post – communist country (in 18.7 per cent of the items) could be an example of journalists' habit of clinging to accustomed labels. While using the label of 'a post – communist country' might still help an international audience recognise Poland, the label of 'a new EU Member' seems not to be relevant any more.

### 3.4. Evaluation of the Polish EU Presidency

Besides reporting on the events taking place in Poland during the term of the Poland's EU Presidency, both foreign and domestic news media provided comments and opinions regarding Poland's performance. Table 4 presents the findings on the attitude towards Poland in opinion items (editorials, columns, news commentary, or interviews) related to the Polish EU Presidency.

**Table 4. Attitude towards Poland in the opinion items related to the Polish EU Presidency (%)**

Country	Positive	Negative	Both positive and negative	Neutral
Austria	28.1	8.8	3.5	59.6
Belgium	25.0	25.0	41.7	8.3
Estonia (online)	2.6	0	2.6	94.9
Greece (newspapers)	15.4	15.4	23.1	46.2
Greece (online)	38.6	5.3	7.0	49.1
Romania (newspapers)	16.6	4.0	1.3	75.4
Romania (online)	25.2	9.4	3.6	61.8
Spain	40.0	0	0	60.0
Poland	23.5	16.6	6.7	53.2
<i>Euronews</i>	27.0	0	27.0	46.0

Source: Media Coverage of the Polish EU Presidency Project

In most of the countries (Estonia, Romania, Spain, Greece, Austria and Poland) a significant portion of the opinion items were either neutral or balanced.

For example, in Estonia as many as almost 95 per cent of the opinion items were neutral, in Romania 75.4 per cent of the items in newspapers and almost 62 per cent in online media did not include either a clearly positive or negative attitude. The countries with the highest scores of positive attitudes presented in the opinion items were Spain (in 'El Pais') and Greece (online media). In Austria, Belgium, Romania (online media), Poland and on *Euronews* around a quarter of the opinion items evaluated Poland's performance in a positive way.

On the other hand, the most critical attitude could be found in Belgian newspapers (25 per cent of the opinion items included some negative evaluation of the Polish EU Presidency), Polish media (16.6 per cent) and Greek newspapers (15.4 per cent). Belgian and Greek newspapers as well as *Euronews* published a significant number of items including both positive and negative evaluation of Poland's performance. Namely, as many as almost 42 per cent of the items in the Belgian sample were coded as ambiguous, while in Greek newspapers and on *Euronews* one third of all the items expressed both positive and negative attitudes.

## **Conclusions**

Although the numbers of news and opinion items devoted to Poland differed across the countries under study, we may still conclude that the Presidency of the European Union Council may be perceived as an opportunity for a country to increase its media coverage and enhance its image. The quantitative content analysis of news media in seven countries and for one international TV station has shown that for media in some countries (Greece, Romania, Spain) the topic of the Presidency was of a high importance. In other countries, where the numbers of items devoted directly to the Presidency were smaller (Austria, Belgium, Estonia), Poland was still referred to in the context of articles on EU relations. The central topics of discussion were the economic crisis, the political debates about possible solutions for the EU region, and diplomatic visits or reports on diplomatic negotiations and agreements between states.

Since the economic crisis dominated in the media coverage of EU-related topics in 2011, it provided an opportunity to report on Poland's better economic situation, including job market situation, in comparison to other countries in the region. Furthermore, sports-related topics, including game results, teams, coaches, championships, transfers of players to certain sports teams or the athletes' physical skills and performance, are usually heavily covered by the media. The fact that during the Polish Presidency term the

qualification matches for the EURO2012 took place definitely added some air time to the media coverage of Poland in 2011. Finally, in the area of culture Poland was mainly addressed in the context of articles that reported on exhibitions or reviewed art or artists (in Poland or by Polish artists), for example in the form of books, music, or performances. At the same time, potential areas of disturbance such as internal politics or crime and justice were covered in only a small number of news items.

The overall evaluation of the Poland's performance during the EU Presidency term was neutral. However, the high scores of both neutral and positive attitudes presented in the opinion items in foreign news media should be interpreted as an indicator of a successfully conducted EU Presidency. Moreover, the fact that in most of the items Poland was portrayed as a 'regular' (not 'new') EU Member may also be perceived as a success and a sign of approval. It seems that only *Euronews* still has a fixed image of Poland as 'a new EU member' and 'a post-communist country'.