

Polish Journal of Political Science

Volume 6 Issue 2 (2020)



Wydanie bieżącego numeru PJPS – zadanie realizowane w ramach umowy 874/P-DUN/2019 ze środków Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego przeznaczonych na działalność upowszechniającą naukę.



**Ministry of Science
and Higher Education**

Republic of Poland

Polish Journal of Political Science

Volume 6 Issue 2

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eISSN 2391-3991

Original version: e-book

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Table of Contents

Articles

Marzena Kuczyńska

Terrorism pictured by Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI *p. 7*

Gabriela Piotrowska

Defining threats linked to the influx of immigrants and refugees to France based on the report «Attitudes Towards Refugees, Immigrants, and Identity in France» *p. 39*

Grzegorz Kowalczyk

A path to follow or a journey to the unknown?
Brexit in Polish opinion weeklies before and after the referendum *p. 57*

**Cezary Smuniewski, Marcin Składanowski,
Łukasz Przepiórka**

The contribution of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland to creating health security at the beginning of the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic *p. 91*

Błażej Bado

Secular and religious terrorist groups according to Yonah Alexander *p. 129*

Grzegorz Kowalczyk

University of Warsaw

**A path to follow or a journey to the unknown?
Brexit in Polish opinion weeklies before
and after the referendum**

Abstract

As an unprecedented event in the European history Brexit was an important reference point in the Polish media. The paper analyses how the Polish opinion weeklies, as one of the topmost opinion-forming Polish media, reported on Brexit and assessed the phenomenon. Basing on the content analysis of the four most prominent Polish opinion weeklies it has been concluded that regardless of their editorial line in relating Brexit to the Polish reality and the political situation in Europe this phenomenon was negatively evaluated. All the titles pointed out that it was a crisis for the European Union and a success for Eurosceptics. National politics and national factors such as the problematic situation of the Polish community in the UK played an essential role in its assessment. The topic of Brexit was often referred to Poland's possible exit from the European structures or loss of an ally who tried to stop the European integration proposed by France and Germany.

Key words: Brexit, content analysis, Polish opinion weeklies, referendum, European Union, media discourse

Introduction

Brexit is an unprecedented phenomenon in the European political history. Never before has any country left the European structures – only Greenland in 1985 decided to resign from membership without being a fully independent member of the organisation. It is worth remembering that Brexit is a unique phenomenon not only politically but also in the media.

The literature covering the current relationship between the UK and the European Union is primarily concerned with political science aspects. This issue has received very detailed coverage in many publications.¹

The relationship between the referendum result and the media has also been of equal interest to researchers. Previous publications have often concluded that the British press had a relatively strong influence on the local population's political views and, thus, indirectly affected the referendum's outcome.² Other phenomena characterising the media discourse on Brexit have also been discussed in academic literature. Researchers have addressed, among other things, a critical discourse analysis of the nationalist narrative or the spread of fake news about the consequences of Britain's withdrawal from the European Union.³

Having analysed how did Brexit owe much of its success to the media, including print media, it seems worth analysing how did Brexit resonate in the media of other European countries. A cross-sectional qualitative study of the ongoing discourse on the coverage of Brexit confirmed that the event

¹ E.g. Jensen&Snaith (2016), Hobolt (2016), Gamble (2018).

² E.g. Levy (2016).

³ Gavin (2018).

was perceived in the media as a significant socio-political crisis compared to other problems known from Europe's post-war history.⁴

Brexit has occurred in the UK, but it affects other countries. It provides a reference point for the European policies of other Member States as evidenced by the emergence of Brexit-like acronyms for other countries. Brexit itself was a paraphrase of Grexit – Greece's withdrawal from the European Union due to the ongoing economic crisis.⁵ After the 2016 referendum, on the other hand, the media used similar acronyms to other Member States assessing their internal policies that might be heading towards withdrawal from the organisation.⁶ This situation shows that the subject of Brexit in the columns of the European media went beyond mere sections dealing with international politics. These discussions were at the same time the basis for debates about the future of a particular state in the European structures.

The research results so far seem to be worth deepening more in-depth analysis, with a distinction being made between individual countries, the political actors involved, the emotional nature of the statements or the subject matter which accompanied the description of the phenomenon. The Polish study may serve as a comparative material for the analyses mentioned above. It is no coincidence that the media referred to Brexit in the context of Central and Eastern European countries – Poland and Hungary. These are the countries that have often been regarded as Eurosceptic or even aiming to leave the European Union. The tensions between Warsaw or Budapest and Brussels were evidenced,

⁴ Krzyżanowski (2019).

⁵ Iordanoglou & Matsaganis (2017).

⁶ E.g. Ash (2020).

among others, by the European Commission's actions on the activation of the procedure under Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union against Poland as a country that violates the EU rule of law.⁷

That is why the analysis of the debate around Brexit in Poland seems to be particularly interesting. The debate focuses on the European Union as a whole, its pros and cons, and the most critical challenges it faces as a community. The detailed analysis of Polish opinion weeklies is, in turn, interesting because of the function they play in the media system – for this type of press in Poland is distinguished by greater emphasis on shaping the opinions of its audience and other media.⁸

Therefore, researching how this phenomenon has been presented in Poland becomes even more valuable – Polish weeklies can impact how Polish public opinion is shaped. Furthermore, the way they report on Brexit may also, to some extent, be indicative of how they would report on a similar event taking place in Poland.

International politics is an essential element of media coverage and often affects opinions on the domestic political scene. The research conducted in this paper aims to show what role Brexit played in describing the Polish political scene and Polish existence in the EU by weeklies. This topic is essential because the withdrawal of one of the largest European Union countries from its structures directly affects the organization's further operation and the political situation in other Member States, including Poland. Therefore, an essential element of the study is a) to determine how the weeklies related

⁷ Gabor (2018).

⁸ Bartoszewicz (2019).

to Brexit's consequences; b) how they interpreted this event in the context of domestic politics.

An essential aspect of the study is to determine what predictions concerning the situation of Great Britain and possible events were formulated by Polish authors, writing in the most significant Polish periodicals pages. With the passage of time and the end of negotiations, it can be reasonably ascertained to what extent the predictions turned out to be correct. The study also allows for partial verification of the extent to which sympathies and antipathies regarding Polish political events expressed in individual weeklies reflected the editors' attitudes towards Britain's withdrawal from the European Union. Nowadays, numerous political science publications raise the so-called 'personalisation of politics', i.e. describing political events from the viewpoint of the individual characters involved.⁹ By examining how the weeklies mentioned above portray particular figures, this paper aims to verify whether the materials analysed also fit into this trend.

Due to its topicality, Brexit analysed from a media studies perspective has not yet been comprehensively developed. Understandably, the literature covering the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Community and later the European Union is primarily focused on political aspects. This issue has received very detailed coverage in both Polish and foreign publications. However, Brexit is a new phenomenon and potentially volatile.

Considering that Brexit is an unfinished process, it must be acknowledged that the study carried out covers the most important, but only a particular stage relating directly to the voting and the referendum results. It is supposed to present

⁹ Karvonen (2007), Campus (2010).

a fragment of media reality concerning the described phenomenon, using literature typical for press studies.

This paper aims to show how Britain's exit from the European Union was perceived by the largest circulation, secular Polish socio-political weeklies – *Do Rzeczy*, *Newsweek*, *Polityka* and *W Sieci*. The post factum published content should be more comprehensive than potential forecasts before the actual voting, so this study examines the texts written one week before and two weeks after the referendum. The sample, therefore, included the texts published between 20 June and 6 July 2016. The materials in which the phrase 'Brexit' occurred and at least 1/4 of the entire text was devoted to it were analysed.

The study will use the methods and techniques known from media research. The leading role is played by a content analysis, on the basis of which a quantitative analysis will be carried out, taking into account the variables necessary for the study.¹⁰ According to the chosen method, the content analysis, an essential part of the work will be to explore the content and compare the messages in the different titles. The analysis of how much space did the titles mentioned earlier devote to Brexit on their pages; how often did particular figures mention the content included in the sample – their position on the balance of gains and losses after Brexit as well as any future predictions – was also examined.

Basing on the categorisation key, a digital database will be created with information on the components and specifics of the analysed messages. Another important aspect is the comparative analysis of the collected material – checking whether the theses or opinions contained in the texts

¹⁰ Kerlinger (1973).

differed from each other, and if so, according to which determinants – editorial, genre or thematic.

Basing on the above elements, the study identified the following research questions: Which axes of personal, international and social disputes in Brexit did the Polish weeklies outline?; How did the Polish weeklies evaluate the phenomenon of Brexit and how did they translate it into the state of the European Union?; What predictions were made about Brexit immediately after the referendum?

They will make it possible to assess how the articles in the weeklies adopted a national or international perspective in their information. Thanks to the passage of time, the author will also be able to answer the question as to how accurate the forecasts contained in the materials turned out to be.

The fact that this study is conducted several years after the referendum also allows testing the so-called CNN effect, known from the literature on the subject, i.e., the media's influence on the state's international policy.¹¹ On the other hand, the opposite phenomenon is possible – just as foreign policy is often used to benefit relations within the state,¹² so the media themselves may act – use events from external policy to argue their position on domestic policy.

Results

In analysing these publications, I adopted the assumptions already developed in research on the Polish media. As a result, I classified *Polityka* and *Newsweek* as liberal/left-wing magazines, while *Do Rzeczy* and *W Sieci* as conservative/

¹¹ Livingston (1997).

¹² Lumsdaine (1996).

right-wing ones.¹³ The sample included 63 texts – 12 from *Polityka*, 14 from *Newsweek*, 18 from *Do Rzeczy* and 19 from *W Sieci*. Already on this basis it can be concluded that it is the two titles considered to be right-wing that devoted most space on their pages to the topic of Brexit at the time of the referendum.

The index indicates the text area and whether the text was a featured topic on the cover. The following scoring was used to calculate the index: material on a maximum of $\frac{1}{4}$ page is 0.25 points; between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ is 0.5, between 0.5 and 1 page is 1 point, and 2 points for an article exceeding this limit. Besides, 1 point was awarded for each photo, and a cover story on Brexit was awarded 3 points per issue. Thus, the exposure index for each of the weeklies is as follows:

Magazine	Score
<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	48.5
<i>Newsweek</i>	37.25
<i>W Sieci</i>	32.25
<i>Polityka</i>	29.25

The table shows that the political orientation did not determine whether a given medium devoted space on its pages to Brexit during the referendum, even despite the disproportion in the number of texts themselves. On the one hand, *Do Rzeczy* gave the greatest prominence to its material on the subject, but on the other, grouping the analysed titles according to the right-wing/left-wing axis, it was the left-wing option that altogether gave more prominence to the subject of Brexit.

¹³ Dobek-Ostrowska (2011), Kotras (2013), Kotras (2016), Mielczarek (2018).

Topics

The topics of the published texts were relatively homogeneous. The dominant theme of most texts was politics. It occupied the leading position in 45 articles. A much smaller number of articles focused on the economy (7 texts) and society (4 texts) understood as citizens' lives, movement of people, or social problems that resulted from the referendum and that may arise as a result of Brexit. Only two texts – one each from the weekly magazine *W Sieci* and *Do Rzeczy* – analysed Brexit primarily in terms of military consequences – further action by NATO. The list of side topics is slightly different. Social issues dominate – the situation of British society, immigrants' position, and the sizeable Polish minority living in Britain are often discussed. Politics as a dominant theme is also often complemented by economy, which was the second topic in 26 texts, and culture, appearing as a side topic in 10 texts. Again, as in the central theme, the whole is complemented by military issues (2 texts), again raised in two texts by the duplicate titles – one by *Do Rzeczy* and *W Sieci*.

Title of weekly magazine	Main subject	Number of texts on a given main theme / Number of all texts in the magazine	Secondary subjects (may be more than one)	Number of texts on a given issue / total number of texts in the magazine
<i>Polityka</i>	Politics	0.83	Culture	0.25
	Economics	0.083	Economics	0.5
	Society	0.083	Society	0.58

<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	Politics	0.72	Economics	0.27
	Economics	0.16	Society	0.83
	Society, Militarism	0.055	Culture	0.11
<i>Newsweek</i>	Politics	0.64	Economics	0.42
	Society	0.22	Society	0.64
	Economics	0.14	Politics	0.36
<i>W Sieci</i>	Politics	0.78	Society	0.63
	Society	0.1	Economics	0.53
	Militarism, Economics	0.05	Culture	0.26

All the analysed titles were dominated by political themes with a clear advantage over others. In each case, it noticeably outweighed the other side categories, indicating that it was the only topic covered in many materials. It means that even if the focus was on the possible consequences of Brexit, economic and social effects were often ignored. Among non-political issues, the most common focus was on social and economic themes, such as economic development, maintenance of the Eurozone and introduction of possible tariffs, how the UK's exit might affect migration and the lives of Poles who live there. Military texts dealt with the impact of Brexit on NATO, while with respect to culture, which is sometimes a side issue, it is mainly a discussion of the extent to which the British identify with continental Europe and how the referendum result relates to the perception of elites.

The fact that news coverage of Brexit focused on politics is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for determining whether Brexit provided an opportunity for individual titles to: a) describe the events from the viewpoint of particular political actors; b) maintain or contest their political liberal or conservative editorial line.

Political actors

Brexit was considered in the Polish weeklies primarily from the political perspective, which is confirmed by the frequency with which specific names and figures from this sphere of public life appear in the texts. Politicians are figures in 51 texts, with 46 articles featuring more than one of them.

	Proportion of texts mentioning a given actor to the total number of texts from the magazine				
	<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	<i>Newsweek</i>	<i>Polityka</i>	<i>W Sieci</i>	Total average
David Cameron	0.50	0.71	0.58	0.53	0.57
Jarosław Kaczyński	0.22	0.36	0.50	0.16	0.29
Jean-Claude Juncker	0.39	0.14	0.00	0.37	0.25
Marine Le Pen	0.28	0.29	0.17	0.21	0.24
Angela Merkel	0.22	0.14	0.25	0.32	0.24
	<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	<i>Newsweek</i>	<i>Polityka</i>	<i>W Sieci</i>	Total average
Nigel Farage	0.28	0.14	0.33	0.11	0.21
Donald Tusk	0.17	0.14	0.25	0.26	0.21
Martin Schulz	0.22	0.07	0.00	0.37	0.19
Boris Johnson	0.11	0.21	0.33	0.11	0.17
Beata Szydło	0.22	0.00	0.17	0.05	0.11

	Proportion of texts mentioning a given actor to the total number of texts from the magazine				
Andrzej Duda	0.06	0.07	0.25	0.05	0.10
Vladimir Putin	0.00	0.29	0.00	0.00	0.06

The analysis of the frequency with which individual actors were pointed out proves that individual titles chose the main characters of Brexit as if creating a kind of a combination referring to V. Propp's morphology of fairy-tale.¹⁴ In the narrative of each magazine, the actors can be divided into Euro-enthusiasts and Euro-sceptics. The first group includes EU politicians and the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, who is critical of Brexit, which is perceived as an event they wanted to prevent (D. Tusk, J.C. Juncker, A. Merkel, M. Schulz). On the other hand, their opponents were British politicians supporting the leave option: Nigel Farage and Boris Johnson, as well as figures presented as enemies of European integration – Marine Le Pen and Vladimir Putin. On the other hand, it is difficult to unequivocally classify D. Cameron, who is often presented both as a person who, having Eurosceptic feelings, led to organization of the referendum and as a politician who opposed leaving the European Union.

It is worth noting the figures mentioned as escaping from the categories of British, Polish and EU politicians. They were identified as participating in the Brexit process from outside the centre of events and the national perspective. Angela Merkel was framed as a leading force in the EU, an embodiment of Germany's most determined EU player. On the other hand, Marine Le Pen was presented as the greatest internal

¹⁴ Propp (1964).

threat to the cohesion of the European Union – and it was pointed out that Brexit indicates that Eurosceptic sentiment in Europe is intensifying. This phenomenon will translate into the increasing popularity of the politician. Vladimir Putin, on the other hand, is an external enemy who was keenly interested in Brexit.

It should be noted that the Polish media, when pointing to domestic politicians, mainly focused on the ideologically opposite option – *Polityka* and *Newsweek* more often mentioned Jarosław Kaczyński, Andrzej Duda and Beata Szydło. At the same time, *Do Rzeczy* and *W Sieci* together in a higher percentage indicated Donald Tusk and described Brexit as his failure for which he bears responsibility.

There was also a high exposure of Jarosław Kaczyński, who did not hold any state function at that time but was the ruling party leader in Poland. He was most often framed as a leader in Polish politics, a kind of demiurge who, on the one hand, had lost an ally in the EU, while, on the other, should be happy that the EU would become weaker and negative attitudes towards it would grow.

Parties to the conflict

In presenting politics in the light of actions by individuals, it is equally important to outline the sides to the argument, i.e. characters acting in opposition to each other, presenting completely different views.¹⁵ It shows to what extent the media, in line with one of the classical approaches to politics and rhetoric, use the enemy-foe comparison to explain political

¹⁵ Kriesi et al. (2012).

processes to their readers.¹⁶ This narration mode was found in 17 of the 63 analysed texts, making it, although not dominant, significant and noticeable. Interestingly, right-wing weeklies – *Do Rzeczy* and *W Sieci* – presented such a vision much more often (11 times).

Conflicts can be divided into four main categories:

a) Intra-British conflict

The most frequently mentioned (6 times) by Polish weeklies when describing Brexit was the conflict between a Brexit supporter and the political face of withdrawal from the EU, Nigel Farage, the United Kingdom Independent Party leader and Prime Minister David Cameron, who is a supporter of the remain option. It was pointed out that Brexit was a success of Nigel Farage, who led it and started talking about it. Simultaneously, David Cameron was described as a symbol of failure, who failed to convince the British people of the contradiction he represented (on the one hand, he organised the referendum, and the other urged to stay in the EU). He also became a victim of Farage's policies, which forced him to resign.

b) The UK-Europe conflict

This dispute was presented very differently from the conflict in the UK, as evidenced by Prime Minister D. Cameron's different position. From being a supporter of the remain option, he became a factor that caused Brexit. Besides, he acted in opposition to EU politicians, bolstering the negotiating

¹⁶ Netelenbos (2016).

requirements based on which the UK would stay in the EU. His main rival was the head of the European Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, who wanted to preserve the status quo and keep the UK in the EU structures. He failed, however, and the weeklies gave him dual coverage. The liberal/left-wing framed him as a politician who lost due to a rising tide of populism and the foul methods used. The right-wing conservatives framed him as an inept leader of the EU structures, whose behaviour contributed to the unfavourable referendum result. However, this conflict was sometimes presented in light of rivalry between other politicians. On the EU side, the President of the European Council Donald Tusk was identified, and on the side of the British Eurosceptics Nigel Farage and one of the prominent supporters of the leave option in the Conservative Party, Boris Johnson.

c) The conflict within Poland

In the materials on Brexit, the context of Polish domestic political rivalry also resounded clearly. This axis of the dispute was presented in *Polityka*, *Newsweek* and *Do Rzeczy*. Journalists resorted to transferring the significance of the UK referendum to the dispute in Poland. It was to be translated into politics in Poland and the conflict between the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party and the most significant opposition Civic Platform (PO) party. While the Law and Justice party was identified by all the weeklies with the figure of the party leader Jarosław Kaczyński, in fact on the other side, as the leader of the opposition in Poland the media saw Donald Tusk, who was at that time serving as President of the European Council, and the leader of the opposition, Grzegorz Schetyna. On the one hand, the dispute was defined

in two ways; the liberal/left-wing media described Kaczyński as having lost an ally in the EU, and Donald Tusk as an influential European politician. In contrast, and on the other hand, the right-wing conservative media said that the vision of a Europe of the Homelands proclaimed by the Law and Justice leader would prove more effective than the Civic Platform policy represented by Grzegorz Schetyna.

d) The Polish-EU conflict

Equally crucial against the backdrop of Brexit was Poland's dispute with the European Commission over the rule of law and possible activation of Article 7 of the Treaty on European Union due to the Polish reforms of the judiciary. All analysed weeklies identified this dimension as a personal battle between the PiS leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, the European Commission chief, Jean-Claude Juncker, and the Belgian Liberal leader in the European Parliament, Guy Verhofstadt. In this view, the conservative/right-wing media pointed out that weakening the EU will make it less eager to pull Poland down on Article 7, and besides, Brexit proves that Kaczyński's vision is better than the plan of European politicians seeking further integration. On the other hand, the left-wing/liberal media warned that the head of the Law and Justice party could have a similar effect on Poland's potential departure from the European Union and a move towards authoritarianism. EU politicians can and should counteract this.

In this aspect of the analysis, it can be seen that domestic politics played a significant role in the articles on Brexit. Although the selection of political actors in the analysed texts does not suggest that the local dimension has replaced the international dimension of Brexit, it was indeed an essential part

of the disputes presented in the magazines. All the analysed magazines agreed that Brexit had an impact on the political situation in Poland – it strengthens or weakens the Polish government or opposition.

Exposure of states

It is necessary to check the frequency of individual countries' appearance to confirm that the international politics represented in the weekly opinion magazines was merely an extension of national politics.

	Proportion of articles mentioning an actor in relation to the total number of articles in the magazine				
	<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	<i>Newsweek</i>	<i>Polityka</i>	<i>W Sieci</i>	Total average
United Kingdom	16	14	12	16	0.92
Poland	15	12	10	11	0.76
Germany	10	7	7	13	0.59
France	9	6	5	10	0.48
	<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	<i>Newsweek</i>	<i>Polityka</i>	<i>W Sieci</i>	Total average
USA	4	6	5	5	0.32
Russia	3	1	1	5	0.16

There are no references to the UK in the five texts on Brexit – this indicates that the authors did not always treat the phenomenon as inseparably linked to the state itself. Together with the fact that they often pointed to other countries, this indicates that they gave Brexit a sometimes universal, supra-national character.

The analysis of the mentioned countries also allows us to conclude that Brexit has become an extension of the national political debates. This statement is confirmed by the fact that Poland was the second most frequently mentioned country. The reality of Polish politics was highlighted as concerns the balance of gains and losses and the impact of Brexit on the Polish diaspora. Germany was further portrayed as the most robust and most influential EU country, which at the same time would have a more significant influence on the further fate of the Community and bore shared responsibility for the UK's exit. On the other hand, France was mentioned as a country that may undergo (with the growing popularity of the National Front) a similar trend to that of the United Kingdom, as well as a country that may create EU policy together with Germany without British resistance. The United States was presented from the angle of the November 2016 presidential election, the future of the North Atlantic Alliance or the role the US may play militarily in Europe. Russia, in turn, was portrayed as an enemy of the international transatlantic order, which profits from – according to the left-wing/liberal media – Britain's withdrawal from the European Union, and according to the conservative/right-wing media – the European Commission's mistakes and lack of a harsh response to, for example, the conflict in Ukraine.

Exposure of international organisations

	Share of texts mentioning a given country in relation to the total number of texts from a particular magazine				
	<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	<i>Newsweek</i>	<i>Polityka</i>	<i>W Sieci</i>	Total average
European Union	17	14	11	19	0.97

	Share of texts mentioning a given country in relation to the total number of texts from a particular magazine				
	<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	<i>Newsweek</i>	<i>Polityka</i>	<i>W Sieci</i>	Total average
NATO	6	3	2	4	0.24
United Nations	1	0	0	2	0.05
Visegrad Group	2	0	0	1	0.05

Understandably, the European Union, which was affected, was mentioned most frequently among all international organisations. However, worth noting is also the frequent mention of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. The authors saw a legitimate connection between changes within the Union and the effectiveness of military cooperation. Occasionally, attention was also drawn to the United Nations and the Visegrád Group, which would balance Germany and France's Euro-integration intentions instead of the United Kingdom.

Exposure of social groups

	Share of texts mentioning a specific group in relation to the total number of texts from a particular magazine				
	<i>Do Rzeczy</i>	<i>Newsweek</i>	<i>Polityka</i>	<i>W Sieci</i>	Total average
Immigrants	6	4	5	10	0.40
Non-wealthy British	5	5	4	4	0.29
European officials	3	4	2	9	0.29
Wealthy British	2	3	3	0	0.13

Individual social groups were often referred to in the articles – all in all they appeared in 41 texts. The analysis of the social groups quoted in the texts tells us a lot about the background of Brexit. These groups illustrate the social conflict described in the Polish weeklies. The decision on Brexit was supposed to have been made primarily by the votes of poor British people, who on the one hand were fed up with European bureaucracy identified with Brussels bureaucrats, and on the other with the growing presence of migrants – first from Central and Eastern Europe and then from the Middle East. It should be remembered that the referendum was held in the shadow of the EU migration crisis. The situation of migrants was more often written about by the right-wing weeklies, which had previously been eager to describe the European Union's inefficiency and criticise the mechanism of automatic relocation of refugees. The articles dealt with the possible consequences for immigrants already living in Britain. There was speculation about their potential problems and the Polish community's anxiety as regards the return of some citizens to Poland. Moreover, it was pointed out that the referendum turned into a purely class dispute – the poor's decision to oppose the wealthy elite actively supporting the remain option.

The conservative/right-wing and liberal/left-wing media differed radically in their portrayal of particular groups. The right-wing emphasized that European officials had alienated the British public by their tardiness, trouble-making and compulsion to accept migrants. Left-wing liberals, by contrast, insisted that this manufactured impression was false and based on populism and a dirty election campaign by Eurosceptics who misled the public.

In conclusion, it should be noted that all weeklies 1) considered the lower social strata as the main force behind Brexit; 2) indicated that the issue of migration was an essential element that could influence the outcome; and 3) the dispute over Brexit has a class character.

Expert exposition

In this study, experts are figures who speak as specialists in a particular field, representing NGOs, research and think tanks or universities not directly affiliated to political parties.¹⁷

In order to obtain experts' exposure in the individual weeklies, an index was used which takes into account mentioning an expert (1 point), interviewing an expert (2 points) and publishing an expert's text on their pages (3 points). The analysis conducted in this way shows that experts' most significant exposure was in *Newsweek* (16 points) and *W Sieci* (14 points). The remaining two titles had noticeably less: *Do Rzeczy* – 8 points, *Polityka* – 5 points.

Thus, it turns out that it is not true that the right-wing conservative weeklies abstracted from expertise much more than the liberal left-wing ones did in the case of Poland. The right-wing weeklies twice invoked the figure of an expert to refer to it polemically. The weeklies *W Sieci* and *Do Rzeczy* did so to Aleksander Smolar, President of the Batory Foundation founded by George Soros.

There were noticeable differences in interviews with experts themselves – definitely more were conducted in the liberal/left-wing magazines. The interviewees were both foreign scholars (Norman Davies, Ivan Krastev, Antony Beevor, Jan

¹⁷ Albæk (2003).

Zielonka) and Polish philosophers or economists (Agata Bielik-Robson or Jakub Borowski). Only once an expert (Robert Geyer) was interviewed by the weekly *W Sieci*. On the other hand, the right-wing magazines much more often (five times in total) gave their pages to experts (foreign affairs specialists and academics), while *Newsweek* did it only once. This makes the hypothesis that the analysed weeklies avoided expert opinions altogether during the period in question false. In no case did the selection of experts overlap. Therefore, this can be read as an attempt to create a counter-establishment with their own experts. Brexit was one of the pretexts for this.

Gaining and losing from Brexit

The Polish weeklies mostly looked at the Brexit phenomenon in the context of gains and losses, but the balance was not equally distributed. Most of the articles did not point out the entities for which Britain's exit from the European Union would be beneficial – the predominant statement was that there were many more losers than winners. Gainers were identified in only 26 out of 63 surveyed texts. Among the potential winners of this situation, the UK was most frequently highlighted, although, on the other hand, a more significant proportion of authors considered that leaving the EU would be disadvantageous for the UK. All editors were much more consistent when analysing the losers of Brexit – first and foremost, the European Union was the loser, indicated in 45 of the analysed texts. This was followed by the United Kingdom (in 29 texts), the British public, and the British Conservative Party (six texts).

As many as 16 texts pointing to Brexit's profits (9 in *W Sieci* and 7 in *Do Rzeczy*) were published in the conservative/

right-wing magazines. The authors of the weekly *Do Rzeczy* were unanimous in their opinion that the European Union would lose on Brexit. However, they are divided when it comes to diagnosing who benefits from it – the only entity mentioned seven times is the United Kingdom, which, although sometimes to the detriment of the EU or other countries, stood up for its sovereignty. This opinion was in stark contrast to the articles in *Newsweek* and *Polityka*, as these editorials did not see the reduction of sovereignty by the European Union as a real problem. Besides, the United Kingdom's potential gain from leaving the European Union was negated in five texts published in *Do Rzeczy*, which claimed that no one gains from Brexit and both the United Kingdom and the European Union lose. According to *W Sieci*, the most frequently mentioned entity benefiting from the referendum results was Russia – presented three times in this context. Nine, or nearly half, of the analysed articles in *W Sieci* argued that Brexit benefitted no one and that everyone faced a loss – first and foremost the European Union, and then the United Kingdom itself.

Polityka journalists believe that no one benefits from Brexit and that both the European Union and the United Kingdom lose. It threatens to destabilize the continent politically and economically, and, as a result of the referendum, European stability is exposed to the growing influence of populists. Contrary to the assessments of the authors of *Do Rzeczy*, the British public will lose out if their country leaves the EU. The editors of *Polityka* see no benefit in “regaining sovereignty”, an argument used in *Do Rzeczy*.

The majority of *Newsweek*'s texts pointed to entities that benefit from Britain's exit – an exception compared to other weeklies, which in most of their texts presented the position

that everyone loses on Brexit. According to *Newsweek*, the Russian Federation or the British Conservative Party may benefit from this event – these entities appeared three and two times in this context, respectively. Interestingly, the authors of *Newsweek* agree that both the United Kingdom and the European Union lose from the referendum results. This distinguishes the weekly from others, in which the proportions were not so evenly distributed, and the losses suffered by the EU were much more frequently discussed.

The Polish dimension of Brexit

A vital element of the study was to verify how often the Polish opinion weeklies analysed Brexit and its consequences for the situation in Poland. The British exit was most often – 26 times – presented as a weakening of Poland's position on the international arena. The second most frequently presented forecast was the possible return of Polish economic emigrants to the country. In 14 texts, the predictions were more far-reaching than the lowering of Poland's position globally and spoke of a threat to the country's security. There was also a frequent opinion that Brexit meant the loss of a potential ally within the European Union – this argument was mentioned 15 times. Other frequently mentioned consequences of Brexit for Poland was the possibility of Poland's leaving the European Union in the footsteps of the United Kingdom (mentioned ten times), advancement of Poland in the EU hierarchy (outlined in eight texts) or the consequences of losing the British contribution to the EU budget (six materials with such statement).

Only four texts of *Do Rzeczy* did not include the Polish perspective. This shows that journalists often looked at Brexit

in light of the situation in their homeland. Again, the weekly was a place where second opinions clashed – on the one hand, some journalists or their interlocutors believed that Britain's exit from the European Union would harm Poland. Five texts stated that Brexit would weaken Poland internationally, as many stated that Poland had lost an ally in the EU, and two that it was a threat to Poland's security. Interestingly, four texts raised the issue of Poland's advancement in the EU hierarchy after Britain's exit – much more often than in the other writings. In *Do Rzeczy* there was practically no theme of Poland's potential exit from the EU following the British example, which distinguishes the weekly from *Newsweek* and *Polityka* and makes it similar to *W Sieci*.

In *W Sieci*, Poland's position was analysed mainly in its social dimension – the issue of economic emigration to the United Kingdom. The issue was mentioned seven times. Six times it was claimed that it would weaken Poland in the international arena, but the statement about a threat to state security was avoided. Three times there was an opinion about a rise in the EU hierarchy after the British withdrawal. Similar to *Do Rzeczy*, the issue of Poland leaving the European Union was not mentioned at all.

Nine out of 13 full *Newsweek* texts analysed included the Polish perspective in the context of Brexit. The authors of *Newsweek* thought that Brexit meant, above all, the weakening of Poland in the international arena – this statement appeared in six texts. A similarly essential and possible issue was Poland's potential exit from the European Union. The loss of an ally in European structures was mentioned in five texts, while the threat to Poland's security and the problem of economic emigration returning to Poland were discussed in four texts.

Forecasts

A vital element in the weeklies' material was predictions about what would happen to the European Union and the UK after the referendum. For the analysed Polish weeklies, Brexit meant above all weakening of the European Union. This thesis appeared in 27 texts out of 47 that included possible forecasts about Brexit. According to this assessment, in the face of Britain's exit from the EU, the organization's potential disintegration was becoming more and more possible, although columnists did not explicitly state whether this would happen. The second critical view on the political reality after Brexit was that the effect of the UK's withdrawal would be quite the opposite – it would prove to be a stimulus for further integration, contribute to other federalist tendencies and strengthen cooperation between states remaining in the European structures. Such a thesis appeared in ten of the analysed press materials.

Most articles dealing with the speed of exit from the EU suggested that Brexit was a long process. Ten texts posited that the UK's withdrawal could exceed the expected period and that arduous negotiations would take years. None of the examined texts defended the opposite position that Brexit would take a short time. The only opinion that argues against a protracted process is that it will not happen at all. Such a suggestion appears twice in the weekly *W Sieci*. Twelve texts predicted the United Kingdom's break-up through Scotland's separation, which voted in a separate referendum for remaining in the European Union. Other predictions include claiming that Brexit would create a two-speed Europe or cause an escalation of violence against economic immigrants.

The standpoint of the weekly *Do Rzeczy* on Brexit forecasts was not uniform. Out of 15 texts predicting what could happen in the future, two prominent opinions prevailed – on the one hand, Brexit could contribute to the end of the European Union, and on the other, owing to the stubbornness of European officials Brexit could become a catalyst for further European integration, which was also presented in a negative light as an action wholly detached from reality. Individual predictions that were made include the possibility of Scotland's seceding from the United Kingdom or an increase in violence against economic migrants.

In *Polityka*'s forecasts on Brexit's a dominant opinion was that it could lead to the break-up of the European Union. Such a statement was made in 5 out of 12 analysed texts. Only interviewees from the Civic Platform party upheld the position that it would contribute to further integration. As in other weeklies, the possibility of Scotland's seceding from the United Kingdom was singularly considered. The authors of *Newsweek* stood by the position that Brexit could contribute to the European Union's end. Such an opinion appeared in five out of six texts in which forecasts of further developments appeared.

Eight articles published in *W Sieci* contain the thesis that Brexit will contribute to the European Union's disintegration. This stance has a clear advantage over the opinion that European integration will deepen – this is the forecast found in only two published materials. *W Sieci* most often among the analysed weeklies raised Scotland's separation from the United Kingdom – this possibility was mentioned in four publications. The weekly was also the only one to argue that the procedural issue of Brexit is not a foregone conclusion and it may yet turn out that the country in question will

remain in European structures – this opinion appeared in two texts.

Therefore, the predictions focused on the relationship between the European Union and the United Kingdom as well as the position of the EU itself. The predictions that it would be a long process involving arduous negotiations have indeed come true. However, the speculation about the break-up of the European Union, and also about the secession of Scotland, has not been confirmed.

Discussion & further research

The weeklies took positions in compliance with their editorial line. Like their British counterparts, the liberal/left-wing media criticised Brexit and pointed out that both the United Kingdom and the European Union were losing out on it. On the other hand, the conservative/right-wing media did not support Brexit outright and had doubts somewhat reminiscent of the division within the British Conservative Party itself.

The analysis also revealed features known from the research concerning Euroscepticism, i.e. criticism of the EU for bureaucracy or crises,¹⁸ although it seems that it takes on a specific character in Poland, different from that known from Western countries. It can be assumed that the relatively restrained opinion resulted from Polish society's pro-European attitude and the fact that the right-wing Law and Justice party did not question the sense of functioning within the EU despite the ongoing conflict over the rule of law. This attitude is confirmed by the research on the nature of Polish political

¹⁸ Usherwood&Startin (2013).

parties' Euroscepticism.¹⁹ This, in turn, would confirm the hypothesis indicated earlier that the media evaluate information on international politics by filtering it through the prism of the policies of those in power, but only when they are neutrally or favourably disposed towards them. When the media openly criticise the authorities (which was the case in the analysed texts), it seems that this effect may not work.

The class theme outlined by the weeklies and confirmed in later research on the specifics of Brexit²⁰ also seems to be an interesting thread. It indicates that it may have resulted from social inequalities and conflict between the elites vs. the indigent population. Therefore, Immanuel Wallerstein's theory of the centre-periphery conflict is also reflected in the media discourse, and this analysis confirms this phenomenon. This also alludes to the return of the concept of cleavages,²¹ according to which intra-state conflicts involve entire social groups and are related to wealth or cultural identity. It can be assumed that the Polish weeklies eagerly referred to this theme also because they found these regularities in the Polish realities. They have been proven in many studies.²²

A research deepening or extending this analysis could address several issues. Firstly, a comparative analysis between opinion magazines in other countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, could test whether the Polish observations are in line with perceptions of other media systems or whether they are fundamentally different from them. Secondly, to deepen the Polish analysis by introducing other media such as television, radio, and internet traffic, including social

¹⁹ Paczeński (2015).

²⁰ Evans&Tilley (2017).

²¹ Hooghe&Marks (2018).

²² E.g. Kuświk (2013).

media platforms. Thirdly, to broaden the time perspective of the study – by a diachronic analysis taking into account the Brexit negotiations and possible changes in the perceptions of the media themselves.

Conclusion

A research deepening or extending this analysis could address several issues. Firstly, a comparative analysis between opinion magazines in other countries, especially in Central and Eastern Europe, could test whether the Polish observations are in line with perceptions of other media systems or whether they are fundamentally different from them. Secondly, it would be valuable to deepen the Polish analysis by introducing other media such as television, radio, and internet traffic, including social media platforms. Thirdly, to broaden time perspective of the study – by a diachronic analysis taking into account the Brexit negotiations and possible changes in the perceptions of the media themselves.

Indeed, the opinion weeklies' editorial line determined their approach to Brexit, although the right-wing conservative ones were more reserved in their unequivocal assessment of the event. National politics and national factors, such as the Polish community's problematic situation in the UK, played an essential role in its assessment.

Despite the difference of opinion in their feelings about Brexit itself, the weeklies had many common elements in their coverage. All the titles pointed out that it was a crisis for the European Union and a success for the Eurosceptics.

The magazines on a similar level exposed figures recognised as experts, but each interviewed its own authorities. References to domestic politics and allusions to Polish problems

with the rule of law were also a standard. This was often referred to Poland's possible exit from the European structures or loss of an ally who tried to stop the European integration proposed by France and Germany. However, it cannot be said that local issues strictly displaced the subject of Brexit. Instead, they were complementary depending on the sympathies and antipathies of the authors.

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