Vicious Circle of the Violence in the Media: The Role of Media in International Conflicts Like War and Terrorism

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Abstract:

Media play an important role in contemporary international conflicts. On the one hand they play the role of the fourth estate, controlling actions of politicians, military circles and showing the true face of the tragedy, on the other hand media are influenced by „the offer” of terrorists and create the activity of terrorist groups in the news. This dichotomous character of its role works on the basis of the vicious circle of violence. The mechanism of this circle will be presented on the ground of the observation of Polish television in the time between 11 March and 15 April 2004 – when the main press issues were the war in Iraq and the assassination in Madrid 11 of March 2004. A conducted analysis of the content embracing the period shows the specific functioning of the agenda-setting in media – the endeavour of transmitting the greatest emotional load to presented materials, placing the information about the terrorism on first positions in the hierarchy of the importance and the endeavour of creating future events. It causes almost the immediate reaction of the public opinion which treats presented materials as the most important events for the country and the world. Media call out fear in the public opinion and also the increase of the feeling of the threat with the terrorist activity in the nearest surrounding. Such modus operandi, not only of Polish, but of
all world’s media, encourages terrorists to more and more spectacular assassinations. The spiral of violence constantly increases its speed.

*Keywords*: analysis of content, media violence, war, terrorism, media in Poland, agenda-setting

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**Introduction**

This paper aims at showing the correlation between terrorism acts, media coverage and the reaction of public opinion. In this paper the author would like to explain, on the basis of the agenda-setting process, his own conception of “vicious circle of violence in the media”. The main thesis of this work is, that media are responsible for the part of terrorist incidents. The term *terrorism*, as used in this article, denotes a particular type of violence. One definition of terrorism comes from the U.S. Department of Defense:

“The calculated use of violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological.” Other definitions of terrorism require that the violence is to be directed at innocent parties; *the terrorist not be a nation state*; and the act of terrorism should be very public or symbolic so as to use media coverage to maximize fear¹.

The relationship between terrorism and the mass media is ‘symbiotic’, in that insurgent terrorist organisations use the media as a conduit for their political message to be heard by the target audience, whilst supplying ‘exciting news’ for the media.² It will be presented on the ground the Polish media, where the media started to develop since 1989 when the democratic system began its history.
The Polish Media after the recent seventeen years of socio-political changes took Western patterns of existence. A dual market emerged from the electronic media. Radio, TV and other numerous commercial equivalents broadcast. The lion part of the market belongs to the foreign Investors.

Two major weeklies in Poland in 2004 were chosen for the analysis: ‘Gazeta Wyborcza’, ‘Rzeczpospolita’, two biggest tabloids: ‘Fakt’ and ‘Super Express’, three major opinion-setting magazines: ‘Polityka’, ‘Newsweek’ and ‘Wprost’. Evening news were no exception – the so called: ‘Wiadomości’ – a public station program and ‘Fakty’ – as the counter-balance of the commercial station.

**Elements of agenda-setting**

“The media carry messages to anyone from anyone with the knowledge, skill or importance to make use of them. It may be propaganda or it may be truth, but either way, the media carry powerful influence”.³

One role of a free media in a democratic society is ostensibly to provide the public with information necessary for them to take part in governing themselves. Therefore, the question of how media organizations decide what stories are important and how to cover them becomes a matter of great importance in the society. The term "agenda-setting" was first used in a study by Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Show published in 1972. Agenda-setting is the creation of public awareness and concern of salient issues by the news media. Two basic assumptions underlie most research on agenda-setting: *first* - the press and the media do not reflect reality; they filter and shape it; *second* - media concentration on a few issues and subjects leads the public to perceive those issues as more important than other issues.⁴
The process of selection takes place on various levels and appears in different forms. The ‘negative’ factor in describing drastic events has a vital importance. Galtung and Ruge claim that: ‘the more negative consequences of a given event, the most probable that it will turn to be the most vital news’. They also give four arguments in favour of the above statement. Negative Events, to a greater degree, than those of a positive impact, are relevant to the short-lasting phase criterion, presenting the latter usually requires more time (the short-lasting phase criterion refers to the period of time needed to the presentation of the given event; the more the short-lasting phase criterion is relevant to the character of a given medium, the greater probability of the high status of a given item from the news in the hierarchy of information). Negative information are unequivocal – it means that one can expect a quite high agreement of recognition of these given ones as the negative. They may be described as ‘ensuring’ ones – the are convergent to the vision of the world shared by many people. There appear comparisons with those positive in an unexpected and sudden way.

The aforementioned phenomenon explains the presence of such a great number of negative information in media. Many time media use their impact power for their own purposes – when desperate plight situations take place or when terrorism is activated media want to be the eye-witness of the story. Old food is not recommended to be stuffed again, again and over again. Pressure of being the first before others and immediate to broadcast tell and not retell prevails in the contemporary world of media. The media count on the dramatic transmission of the given event and interviews are of the key importance there. Most media strive to appear professional and so not viewed with suspicion and so discouraged. They want to secure their mobility in the society. It frequently goes further, it also requires the sense of personal and physical security. The media want to be under no stress while at work which is the risky profession with very many dramatic underpinnings such as: violence, violent assaults, murders threatened by terrorists, harassment – (the last but one taking place more
frequently abroad than in the United States.) Protection of the society right to be informed shapes their greater concern. It is frequently supported with the interviews of victims. Media members seem to have no objection in creating the constructive role and feel like terrorism experts that try to solve event-determined acts.

The aforementioned reactions of media enables the spreading of information and may be an advantage for terrorists. The publicity is the same as water for terrorists. Publicity – in normal conditions – is beyond their reach and media are the factor both in spreading the information and spreading and or giving the publicity because one cannot escape from being informed and at the same time being recognized through the offices of a ready-and-automatically made publicity. These two issues always go together and no mental lids can be shut in order to avoid such a juxtaposition. The good example may be the May 1997 CNN interview with Saudi dissident, terrorist recruiter and financier Osama Bin Ladin. Such hot stories are like treasures for news networks. Terrorists usually search for the public understanding of their activity. They want to cure the world using their own methods, methodology and the above mentioned are not free from the ill-fated and degenerating or rather degenerated ideology. It is therefore highly favourable to have good contacts with the press as it provides – ironically – a mutual coexistence. Terrorists also seek legitimacy and good examples may be Hamas or IRA. Every terrorist group or organization has their Musa Abu Marzuq’s and Gerry Adams of Sinn Fein – both cases presented as dichotomy of interests and actions. The first of the above mentioned is believed to be in charge of bombings and assassinations. It means that military and political bonds are of the great importance. They also desire the press to see and they want to be given legitimacy to the points of view of purposely established NGOs – non-governmental organizations and study centres that may serve as cover for terrorists. The best example is: World and Islam Studies Enterprise – controlled and funded by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad or The Hamas-funded Islamic
Association for Palestine (LAP) in Richardson, Texas – one of probably world-numerous examples. Details on identity are crucial in hostage situations as well. Attempts and public exposure, the number of hostages and their real status are no exception. Terrorists need all the above also to amplify panic through the given medium or media to highlight the probability of economic loss and they want to see the loss of courage and faith in people or peoples of their target.

*Governments* stand for the third key important element. They are in between of the two ones that fight for publicity – the media and terrorists. During the time of crisis governments seek understanding, cooperation, restraint, and loyalty from the media in efforts to limit terrorist harm to society and in efforts to punish or apprehend those responsible for terrorist acts, specifically. They demand numerous coverages to move their agenda forward and not that of the terrorist. From the perspective of governments, the media are expected to back up government initiatives aiming at especially those which are underway to spread information provided by a given government if and when requested. This comprises the right apprehension of policy objectives or a balanced presentation at least., e.g., why governments may first want to mediate and then (if at all) not be submissive to terrorist demands. The most important thing is to isolate media from terrorist. It is the most crucial issue.

The second issue that follows is to deny glamorizing terrorists themselves as well as their actions through the media; to view all the criminal suspects with extreme and belligerent suspicion so deep and breathtakingly convincing that no one would question their rampant and unbridled willingness to kidnap, blow something up or hijack! In the situation of taking hostages governments are often likely to limit the media access to the hottest information from the ‘0’ zone however the situation changes considerably when information is to be provided to authorities when reporters have a direct access to the hostages. They are in the constant run for publicity to help to lessen the tension. An important policy objective is to
keep the public reasonably calm. It may be viewed as beneficial if the media (mostly TV) try
to restrain from the VHS or nowadays rather a DVD ‘victimized material’ through sorrow,
mourning and weeping. Undoubtedly it has some significant impact on governments’
concessions and it is the founding stone for building public pressure. The governments’
greatest concern is to stop media from (even) unintentional ‘information campaign’ as far as
the planned actions took against terrorists are in process. This particular data is paradoxically
both helpful for the side of good and the side of evil. The latter is meant to be understood as
terrorists. The importance of responsibility is exemplified through the fact that some
governmental agencies like to feel in control of the leaks for the media and then depicted
favourably in case of losing their good face in the situation of the potential defeat or any other
circumstances that fail to work properly or fail to work at all in the light of the carefully
planned actions that happen to be, because of various reasons, not effective and hardly
applicable in a given situation\textsuperscript{6}.

The three actors described above fight for the \textit{audience}, their own rights an beliefs and
acceptance benefits. The recipients of media, so the main part of the public opinion are an
inseparable element between the participants of the presented phenomenon of agenda-setting:
- new information are sought for the means of mass-communication;
- the more and more drastic content and its great number lively reactions are spotted;
- it participates in events that take place far from the human settlements;
- it reacts more fiercely when the threat reduces the distance to the country and human
settlements;
- on the one hand the reaction of the audience may be manipulated through providing
particular content, and on the other hand – unpredictable when there is too many information-
carrying items;
- the reaction of the audience may influence the next events – calming down the conflict or its escalation, e.g., further terrorist acts.

Inseparability of the four elements, its constant interrelation and mutual dependence makes the author to form the thesis that the above four elements create a self-propelling system and, in turn, it may cause a “vicious circle of violence” – in reality and on TV screens spreading fear amongst the audience and strengthening terrorists. It is noticeable during the course of years, especially after the assassinations on September 11th 2001 in New York. Since that time terrorist attacks became more and more aggressive and more and more frequent, media paid more attention on it and so it caused an increase of sense of threat. Governments simultaneously declared the state of war to terrorists and sharpened the precautions. The aforementioned actions were exposed in media and it influenced the polarization of the public opinion.

Pic.1 Scheme of vicious circle of violence on media
Polish media after 11th march 2004

The Polish media reacted in a similar way as the mass-media in the whole world during the first few days after the assassination in Spain. They focused its attention on Madrid. This tragedy was a media-like-event. It took place in the state that took part in an anti-terrorist coalition. This horrible event took place during the morning rush-hours. 200 people were found dead and as far as the injured are concerned, the number reached almost 1500. It was long time such an event happened in Europe. It caused almost an immediate reaction among journalists and their ‘news competition’. TV stations, for obvious reasons, reacted the most immediately. They were showing a horrifying picture of tragedy – shattered trains, people covered with blood and various remains placed all over the area – not knowing the official and proven information about the people who were behind it. Next, people were informed about the spontaneous reaction of Spaniards giving their blood and willing to help in every possible way, rescue action – that, as media suggested, was to be the second target of exploding bombs set by terrorists. During first hours, Spanish media (also Polish media) based their material on official government sources that pointed ETA as the main suspect. The Polish press and TV prepared information reminding what is ETA, what kinds of attacks it was responsible in history and what kind of threat it is for Spain. First questions about al-Qaida connections with the tragedy were in minority. The reason for that might be the firm cut-off from the political arm of the Bask organization, that pointed that ETA always warns before the event.

When it turned out that al-Qaida admitted the attack, media in Poland had, again, an opportunity to seek hot news, especially that that day there was an anti-terrorist training action
in Warsaw. The training action revealed clearly the lack of coordination among all the civil units involved and the great unknown as far as the who was as if the commander-in-chief responsible for giving orders in this action. Poland together with Spain actively being involved with the anti-terrorist coalition under the USA as the leader might be the target of revenge of al-Qaida. It became a fact in Spain. Further events spread out as an avalanche. Spaniards voted in the parliamentary election for socialists who, at the very beginning, were against sending troops to Iraq; as the consequence, the new government announced the drawback of its contingent and cease its efforts as far as the Nicea regulations are concerned. All the above mentioned actions had direct consequences for Poland. Polish media focused on those issues as well. Additionally they were searching for the Polish accent of the attacks in which some Poles died as well. Patrycja – the seven month infant was the youngest victim of the tragedy and the trains that were moving out from Alcala de Hanares – the place were the is the biggest concentration of Polonia in Spain. An isolation in negotiation with the European Union, possible military problems in the military zone that was in charge of Poles, signals of an insufficient preparation of the Polish civil-protective units directed the attention of media on the possibility of attacks in Poland. The symbolism of the crucial dates was in favour of busting the atmosphere. Easter 2004 was on April 11th. The attack in the US was on September 11th and in Madrid on March 11th.

The press dailies

‘Gazeta Wyborcza’ was the daily that had the greatest number of information connected with Spain and, in consequence, with Poland (Pic.2). ‘Gazeta’ as the only one was publishing numerous and very analytical interviews with the specialists from the Western Europe, including Spain as well as with those from the US – sociologists, political science
specialists and various experts on terrorism. In the first few days reprints from the Spanish press prevailed, mainly those pointing at ETA as the main suspect in the attack. Material that was showing the Prime Minister Aznar in the positive light – through texts comprising approval of his policy and contributions, especially in the domain of economy and unemployment reduction – was also predominant. Issues of a conservative tone were predominant. In spite of this, ‘Gazeta’ was also publishing, however on a smaller scale, reprints from El Pais and comments of publicists, whose opinions were close to socialists, and who pointed al-Qaida’s guilt the quickest. ‘Gazeta’, as the only one, managed to contact Julen Madariaga who in 1953 was forming in Bilbao the basis of ETA – the Bask political organization which was against the dictatorship of general Franco. Madariaga in his interview (13.03.2004) claimed firmly that if it was the Bask group, it would be its political and military defeat. He also did not exclude a possible cooperation of ETA with al-Qaida. ‘Gazeta’ pointed at the Polish victims, writing that four Poles died, including a seven-month female infant. It was also publishing the material connected with the safety in Poland. ‘Gazeta’ was analyzing the changing socio-political situation in the country covered with the veil of mourning. On March 19th, one week after the attack, ‘Gazeta’ prepared the ‘Report on Terrorism’. The Polish reader had an opportunity to familiarize themselves with advice on how to behave in case of attack and what numbers to dial to be informed about the situation in Poland and abroad. On April 1st ‘Gaztea’ as the only one publishes a text about the direct threat of attacks in Poland and al-Qaida’s report found in the Internet by the Norwegian Public Safety Units. In this report terrorists write and pray to for the following: ‘may Kwaśniewski be covered with soil’. Since that time there appear texts about the probable attack in Poland and Poland endangered by this threat. ‘Gazeta’, again, as the first medium asks whether or not one should fear of April 11th? The answer of Zbigniew Siemiątkowski – the person in charge of the Intelligence was ambiguous. On the one hand he was calming the
citizens down, on the other hand he clearly stated that due to the fact of Poland being involved in the anti-terrorist coalition may not be excluded.

‘Rzeczpospolita’ – similarly – issued 71 articles. They were much more mild in reception (titles of lesser connotative loading, texts comprising more information than comments). The tragedy was presented diligently and in a ‘calm’ way. There were no reprints from other newspapers. Polish journalists were working on the overall edition. ‘Rzeczpospolita’ frequently cited ‘Gazeta Wyborcza’ and it supported a given material with analytical material. The daily also was paying attention to the tragedy of compatriots (Poles). It was possible to get to know the hard situation of those who survived. ‘Rzeczpospolita’ did not avoid the case of possibility of such attacks in Poland. Basing on ‘Gazeta’s’ report about al-Qaida, it analysed various variants of terror. It was the second daily that was highlighting the hard situation in a quite balanced way. However the content of the articles reveals that both all the responsible units in service and citizens are not prepared at any rate in case of a similar attack that took place in Spain. This problem was specifically presented by tabloids.

**Tabloids**

During the analysis which is at issue (this article) there were two Poland-wide tabloids – ‘Super Ekspress’ and ‘Fakt’. Both dailies, since the first day, were informing about the attack in Spain. (Pic. 3) The material was mainly about the description of the health condition of Poles there and articles telling about the threat of Poland were exposed. Dailies were pointing out the civil servants and units’ mistakes. On March 13th SE was reminding that, as the first in the country, it was informing that Poland might be the target of terrorists. Before Christmas 2003 the police was put into alert, people were called from their days-off. It was connected with small groups of terrorists with great financial mobility that might be used for
explosives or for bribes and cooperation. Poland was also warned by the USA, Israel, Great Britain and Spain, where a film made on the railway station in Gdańsk and Warsaw was found in the Arabic citizen. SE searching for the connections between the events reminded that November 2003 uniforms of the Polish pilots were stolen. On March 15<sup>th</sup> general Petelicki told in the interview that Poland will not deal with the potential attack because there are irresponsible people in charge and there is lack of financial support on the special units. SE also was showing other factors that might paralyze the country – there was no training in reference to the situation-in-crisis, there was not known who was to be in charge of the most important decisions, there was no joint cooperation between all the rescue units involved, there was no special system of communication, helicopters for transporting victims and there was no special bill allowing to use GROM – a special military unit, to act inside the country.

On March 25<sup>th</sup> SE published the results of the CBOS poll connected with the sense of threat of terrorist attacks among Poles. Colourful statistics were supplemented with the information proving the poll. ‘Gazeta’ noted that the selling of anti-gas masks and protective means increased as well as the considerable move of clients in pharmacies was observed. During the first days of April ‘SE’ was publishing articles about the real threat in Poland. On April 2<sup>nd</sup> on the cover one might read that terrorist were planning again, and Jasna Góra was to be their target (one of the most important religious places in Poland). During Easter we cannot feel safe. Next issue, ‘SE’ wrote that terror in Poland is a real threat and even the President faces this threat. It is connected with the news, materials and terrorists’ logistics. ‘SE’ informed that Polish Intelligence cooperates with the co-workers of Arabic Intelligence from the 70’ living in Poland.

Additionally, as many other dailies, ‘SE’ paid attention mainly to the Polish tragedy in Spain. It was describing the fate of Poles who were to find a better standard of life in the South of Europe and, as a matter of fact, they lost their lives or suffered considerably as far as
their health is concerned. This daily did not write much about victims from other nationalities. A similar approach was presented in ‘Fakt’.

‘Fakt’ reacted very abruptly on the events in Spain. During only the first three days, 16 out of 25 articles (60%) was dealing with Poles and consequences for Poland. Journalists of ‘Fakt’, writing about the tragedy, were frequently highlighting their compatriots ‘were moving to Spain for a better life. (It turned out, however), that ‘they came back in coffins instead (15.03.04)’. A negative emotional load was attached to the printed interviews. An interview with Leszek Miller – the Polish Prime Minister from March 14th was the good example. The Prime Minister was telling that: ‘such a massacre can happen in Poland as well – one should stay in alert’. This daily presented it as a dramatic appeal of the Prime Minister. Additionally there were information about railway stations and airports under severe security control, additional patrols in the streets, greater level of alert in all units of the Intelligence and an increased level of security in the border areas. The very text was enriched with the statement of Mustafa Karkouti – an expert on terrorism who claimed that al-Qaida has got interested in Poland long time ago and real threat is not a realm of pure speculation only. Next days ‘Fakt’ was still publishing materials connected with the lack of anti-terrorist preparations and the possible attack of Islamic fanatics. On March 14th there appears an article entitled: “Al-Qaida is closer and closer to Poland” and a day later – “Shade of terror”. The daily claims that after the attack Poles were afraid of using trains and informs that soon there are to appear patrols on the stations. On March 16th ‘Fakt’ asks Where will the terrorist hit?, pointing at the possibility of other European countries. Four days later (March 20th) the daily publishes the text ‘The net of al-Qaida reaches Poland’. Journalists highlight the fact that the fear of terror is still on a very high level. The reader is informed about that the Bin Laden’s people are all over Europe and have two opportunities of attack. the possible attack may take place during the European Economic Forum in Warsaw or during the election to the
European Parliament. Warsaw and London may be the next targets. Stanisław Koziej – general and the specialist on security matters claims that Poland is seriously under the threat of a terrorist attack. There are many similarities between the two countries that are at issue – they are in the anti-terrorist coalition and the public opinion favours the war in Iraq. Great Britain since long time was the target, unlike our country, GB learned its lesson well with fights with IRA. The long arm of al-Qaida embrace the whole Europe and terrorists may attack any time. Warsaw is the most possible target in Poland as there is the greatest number of foreign people living there. Warsaw residents also most rarely inform the police about various things left unattended.

‘Fakt’ continued the line from March 22nd. There were several articles published: *We are facing the approaching massacre* and *Terrorists are already in Poland!* ‘Gazeta’ was convincing that terrorist plan to attack Poland. It proves its thesis that the police stopped four Pakistani people. This daily also informed that ‘the worst anxiety was being confirmed’. One of the suspects was observing Okęcie airport and the remaining ones had texts about Bin Laden, maps and city-plans of Warsaw as well. On March 23rd ‘Fakt’ informs that it was never before for the police to have such an accurate proofs for the plan of attack. *(The shade of terror over Poland).* ‘Gazeta’ also asks whether or not President Kwasniewski is the target for al-Qaida? The reader also is informed about the potential results of the attack on the Polish capital. When they hit – the tragedy is already there – if the attack in Warsaw was a success, there would be hundreds of victims. If the attacks were simultaneous or if one attacked in small sequences of time in marked places, the state would change into ‘hell’. Ambulance and police units do not have sufficient means to simultaneously fight off such an enormous attack. ‘Fakt’ also presented the map of potential targets. Selected places in Warsaw are symbolic, media-sensitive, important from the political point of view and, moreover, they are crowded.

On April 2nd this daily informs about the long session of the situation-in-crisis committee and
the threat that may affect the President. It also warns, following the official police information, against a possibility of the attack at Easter – April 11th 2004. Information of the similar content and the connotation were also to be found in weekly magazines (opinion creating weeklies).

Weekly magazines

During the analysis which is at issue there were three Poland-wide weekly magazines. From among the analyzed magazines Newsweek reacted the fastest including the biggest quantity of information about this tragedy. In the magazine which is put out like “Fakt” by Axel Springer, a photo report from Spain was printed. On the first five pages in the issue from March 15th, a reader found drastic pictures of victims, blood and destroyed trains. The photo report and other materials about Spain and their consequences had a common title “terror”. The articles were en bloc devoted to present and create a possible attack in Europe, especially in Poland. The headlines were full of negative emotions – “11th September – New York, 11 March Madrid, where now?”, “There are already here”, “Near, still nearer”. A redaction of “Newsweek” gave much room to the analysis of the situation in Europe and Poland. “People of Ossama bin Laden consistently extend their army of fighters on the Continent and build new bases in countries joining to EU”. W. Rogacin wrote that „terrorists had wanted to move to Poland, Czech Republic or Bulgaria not only that the police was weak there, but also for the relatively strong criminal underground which could deliver a weapon, false documents or smuggled money”. According to Roland Jacquard, the President of International Observatory of Terrorism in Paris, the author adds that Europe can became a place of reorganization of extremists and a place where they can hide effectively. A closeness of new members of EU with Western countries will not cause a loss of terrorist’s contacts.
with "nests of their organization". "Newsweek" published also that the Polish people weren’t sure of themselves in country and were afraid of an attack. Almost 80 percent of the Polish people think that Poland is vulnerable to terrorist attacks. The feelings might be increased by the fact, that Integrated Medical Rescue System doesn’t work, a lack of flying ambulances and a lack of money to change this situation. If the Polish system of security works in Madrid, the rescue operation would be continued not a few hours but a few days, adds I. Rycin in his article. A problem of security’s lack was also marked out by ‘Wprost’. „Center of critical chaos” – it was a title of an article where M. Furmanek, President of Civil Security in the reign of Jerzy Buzek, markets out that Poland, being in antiterrorist coalition, stays at war with terrorists. Additionally, there isn’t any system, which makes possible the coordination of information about threats in Poland. It practically means, that the majority of services inform only their superior and reluctantly split information with others. Furmanek called the situation in Poland an „antisystem of safety”. ‘Wprost’ published information of British secret service about the possibility of Poland being attacked by means of biological or chemical weapon and connection of Al-Qaida with the Russian mafia. Routes of smuggling of nuclear materials from the Russian Federation meet in Poland and the Czech Republic, where former officers of communist special services cooperate most likely with terrorists. In the magazine it was possible to find Polish victims’ relations, like it was in other titles. ‘Wprost’ published also issues faultfinding Spanish capitulation towards terrorists. Only three articles about Madrid’s tragedy were published in ‘Polityka’. In the first issue after the tragedy there was only one article with the meaningful title: „Hijos de puta!”. Going beyond the description of events there were references to Poland and comments of advisability of terrorist activity which aim is to knock into the most weak element of democracy – the public opinion. In the next issue (March 23th) ‘Polityka’ published a text of Daniel Passent, who presented different worldwide reaction after Spanish capitulation. In most cases reaction were
negative. People criticized the so called electoral capitulation under terrorists. The author analyzed connections between Spain and Arabic culture (cultural, architectural, historical and language connections) and an activity of the Prime Minister Aznar. On the one hand he showed a high economical increase and cyclical recovery, and, on the other hand the author pointed a renaissance of separatism, not only reach regions. Passent marked out also, that the Americanization of foreign policy of Aznar weakened remarkably the position of Spain in Europe.

Evening news programmes

Many pictures from Spain were published in analysed TV news programmes since the first day after the tragedy. First information in both stations (commercial TVN and public TVP1) were based on an official Spain government’s sources and Spanish mass media. Similarly, like in the Polish press there appeared issues about ETA’s activity and possibility of executing of attack by this organization. ‘Following’ the official political information (political agenda) was clearly visible in the Polish TV stations. At the day of the tragedy information from Spain were set first in the structure of programmes. It was observed till March 15th in ‘Wiadomości’ and till March 16th in ‘Fakty’. (Pic. 4) It doesn’t mean that after this time any information about Madrid were published. Quite the opposite. The information appeared, but differentiated in intensity and context. National security and level of preparation of the Polish secret service in case of an attack were the most often appearing information. Both stations came back to the information explaining consequences of vote’s results, changes of staff and foreign policy of Zapatero. TVN and TVP1 many times broadcasted issues about the Polish victims, tragedy of families which lost their family members and the life of Poles living abroad. A few days after the first huge tragedy in Madrid, terrorists committed suicide.
It was a moment when TV news programmes placed the hot news about the Spanish recent issues as first. They reacted in the same way on the message about a discovered report by Norwegian service where terrorists named president Kwaśniewski and wished him death. During the analysis there were many information during TV news about terrorists in Iraq, a threat of the Polish soldiers in Iraq and intensive worldwide activity of al-Qaida and police’s counteraction. Since April 8th, few days before Easter, evening’s TV news escalated information about a possible attack in Poland. It was connected with organizing the European Economical Forum in Warsaw and incoming Holiday and typical religious processions. (a large concentration of people which could become a potential aim of attack). Media informed about enhanced security for politicians. Special precautions were introduced and accentuated in Vatican where an attack could take place during a procession and threatened of the Holy Father’s. At Easter both stations presented pictures of police patrols deploying around churches and places of high risk. When an attack at April 11th didn’t happen, TVN, TVP1 and other media almost immediately ceased informing about a threat in Poland. Media concentrated on the ongoing political events in Poland, drastic pictures and materials regarded mostly events from the war in Iraq and terrorist activities on areas of Israel and Palestine. (Pic.5)

Conclusions

It is very hard to answer the following question: How was the public opinion influenced through the way of presenting information about the threats of attacks in Poland? Observing the results of public opinion research centres and the way of exposing information in media in the context of functioning of the agenda-setting phenomenon however, one may conclude that media contributed to shaping the Poles’ opinion. In the period that was at issue,
there appeared a full correlation between the results of the research and the content of media materials.

The results of CBOS referring to indicating the most important events for Poland, the world and personal feelings of threat of terrorist attacks may be the proof. CBOS research from April 2004 indicate, as ‘Fakty’ news passed the information, that the feeling of threat increases still and is the highest since ever. In comparison to June 2002, the feeling of personal threat of terrorist attacks increased almost twice. At the same time, the rate showing the number of people declaring no threat was in decrease (60% in 2001 up to 34% in 2004). Attacks in Spain and frequent relations after the event as well as creating “April 11th” in the Polish media might be the cause for the increase of fraction of citizens sharing the opinion of the sense of threat. Quoted CBOS research shows a dramatic increase of the above opinion up to 87% in March 2004. (Pic.6) One observes that the highest fraction of the aforementioned opinions goes simultaneously with the events in Madrid and the intensity of information about terrorism in media. Also the PBS research done because of “Newsweek” initiative proves that approximately 80% of Poles claimed that Poland was in danger of a terrorist attack.

Since March 11th till the end of research almost everyday all media under analysis carried the information about terror, war in Iraq, the threat of the country, lack of preparations and since April 1st media kept asking politicians and people responsible for safety about the repetition of April 11th tragedy. Media sought analogy between the interior situation in Poland and Spain linking the two countries’ involvement in the antiterrorist coalition. The observed analogy between the tendency of presenting information and the increase of the sense of threat may also be linked to the fact that the Polish media treated events in Spain as “hot news”. The events were exposed, especially in its higher pick of the so called “mediality” – shortly after the attacks, next the suicide of terrorists and the information of the President who, allegedly, was in danger. The above phenomenon was not only noticeable in press, but
first of all, in information/news programmes. Both ‘Fakty’ and ‘Wiadomości’ underlined the threat that is due to the fact of the presence of the Polish army in Iraq and consequences of spreading terrorism worldwide. Similarly, as in case of numerous researches on the agenda-setting process in other West European countries, in Poland one observed the correlation between the content of TV news programmes and the judgements of the public opinion as well. It was seen clearly in the light of the increase of the sense of threat of terrorist attacks that may come from the Islamic fundamentalists after the dramatic events described by media. The content that underwent analysis dominated first news items in the hierarchy of news in general in nearly 50% of evening news programmes. (Pic. 7) The two programmes that are at issue very frequently began with the bad news, most often with the information about terrorism. It is quite surprising that the public TV, whose audience is mainly interested in political matters exposes violence, ‘Wiadomości’; news programme, more often as the first news item than ‘TVN’ - a commercial TV station. Both programmes not always covered victims faces. Repeatedly and frequently shown pictures/shots from the March 11th 2004 tragedy stand for the good example. Crying, blood and omnipresent chaos, suffering; these are the most frequently appearing scenes. Showing it might be the direct cause of the increase of fear in Poland. This event was juxtaposed with the compilation of political and military relationships between our country, Spain and death of our compatriots in the blown up train.

Both programmes contributed to „the popularization” of the information about terrorists and kind of their activity. During the analysed period passed public opinion polls showed the growth of fear and the uncertainty in the society, what can suggest the effect of the influence of electronic media on the audience, mostly the television. ‘Fakty’ made a note, for example, the highest ratings by the day, when they related about the attack on the Palestinian sheikh Jassin, paralyzed and moving on the wheel-chair, kickbacks of Arabic societies and the growing threat of attacks in Poland. Reactions which became called out at
the Polish viewers, are the main objective of extremist groups worldwide. They aim constantly at showing themselves in media and developing of the fear. Observed occurrence of the correlation among findings of the public opinion and with the content of researched media confirms the functioning ‘of the vicious circle of the violence’. Distinct is also the influence, which exert media on their own receivers. The media, being the main source of information, have an ability to the formation of the opinion and creating of the reality. In the period of conflicts or activities of terrorist groups contribute more often to the escalation of negative reactions of viewers.
Notes


Pic. 2. Quantity of information about the tragedy in Spain on the main Polish daily newspapers.

The main daily newspapers

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Pic. 3. Quantity of information about the tragedy in Spain on Polish tabloids

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Pic. 4. Quantity of information about Spain on TV news

Pic. 5. Quantity of information about terrorism on TV news
Pic. 6. Can Poland be the aim of the terrorists attack?


Pic. 7. Terror on the first position in the structure of information
References


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