

**PRACTICE OF POLITICAL PARTIES' ACCESS TO PUBLIC MEDIA IN POLAND:
THE CASE OF THE GDAŃSK BRANCH OF POLISH TELEVISION**

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Abstract

Media in political communication processes shape the way citizens perceive politics, which translates into political attitudes, opinions, and behaviours. Recognised as one of the main political actors, they serve as a tool for conducting politics. Public media, in particular, are expected to maintain reliability and pluralism. The purpose of this article is to present how legal regulations in Poland concerning equal access of politicians to public media are reflected in practice. As a case study, the weekly political commentary programme “Och, ta polityka” (‘Oh, That Politics’), broadcast on TVP Gdańsk, was selected. It constitutes an important space for discussions on Polish and international politics, involving representatives of various parliamentary parties.

Key words: media, public, political communication, media law, public debate.

Introduction

Mass media and politics constitute two functional systems existing alongside others, such as education, the economy, or religion (Graszewicz, 2007, p. 78). Political communication operating within these systems has been given many definitions, depending on the complex processes it undergoes and the research perspective adopted. The definitional difficulties stem from addressing two complex processes that are subject to constant change—namely, the political process and the communication process (Michalczyk, 2005, p. 16). In their diversity, these definitions include the media among political actors (Dobek-Ostrowska, 2012, p. 45; McNair, 2017, p. 17–105; Maj et al., 2017 p. 9–15; 10–11). They appear alongside such political actors as politicians, political parties, governments, state institutions, non-governmental organisations, interest groups, experts and analysts—including public relations experts, media relations specialists, political marketing professionals—as well as citizens. Each of these actors performs various roles: from creating and transmitting content to receiving, interpreting, and responding to messages (Szczepański, 2023). Together, they form a dynamic system of information exchange in which public debate and the shaping of opinions on political issues take place (Szkudlarek-Śmiechowicz, 2014).

The most visible, front-line actors through whom voters perceive a vision of politics are political leaders. The media, which both mediate and participate in political discourse, are ascribed roles of varying significance: from exercising power and making claims to being tools subjected to control through legal regulations (Jastrzębski, 2007, p. 288). In democratic systems, the most significant role refers to that of the fourth estate, i.e., the watchdog function. In this capacity, the media's task is to monitor the activities of those wielding political, economic, and social power,

and to expose abuses, irregularities, and actions contrary to the public interest. As P. Norris observes, media operating in the watchdog model “not only inform citizens but also act as a whistle-blower, warning against abuses of power and exerting pressure on public institutions to ensure their accountability and transparency” (Norris, 2000, p. 217). Many scholars, however—especially in recent decades—emphasise the significant influence of political marketing, including public relations and media relations specialists, on agenda setting in the media. These actors are pointed to as creators of public debate, including political discourse (Biskup, 2019, p. 29–36).

Regardless of this dispute, audiences can observe the increasing activity and participation of the media in political communication processes that shape how citizens perceive politics and politicians. This translates into political attitudes, opinions, and behaviours (Ossowski, Piontek, 2018 p. 235). Public media play a particular role, as they are expected to be reliable and maintain neutrality toward diverse public interest groups—that is, to ensure political, cultural, and economic pluralism (Ociepka, 2003). These expectations fall within several areas: the tradition and entrenchment of democratic mechanisms, as well as ethical and legal frameworks regulating the functioning of public media.

The most general provision regulating the public service mission, including pluralism, of public media in Poland is contained in Article 21 of the Act of 29 December 1992 on Radio and Television Broadcasting (hereinafter referred to as the Broadcasting Act). Among the main tasks, alongside the creation and dissemination of nationwide programmes, are regional programmes, programmes for audiences abroad, and others that meet the democratic, social, and cultural needs of local communities (Act of 29 December 1992 on Radio and Television Broadcasting).

In the political (party) discourse on the functioning of public media — particularly regarding the practice of ensuring equal access of politicians to television airtime — representatives of various political camps have for years expressed convergent views. The essence of these views lies in affirming the need, and even the necessity, for the media to guarantee political objectivity and equal access of political parties to broadcasting time. In practice, however, there is a significant discrepancy between these declarative statements and the actual functioning of the media. Most often, the electoral success of a party translates into its political dominance, including within public media structures. This, in turn, implies that the main concern is not the implementation of the principle of pluralism, but rather the pursuit of particular party interests. Consequently, public media often operate as public relations agencies serving those in power.

Equally significant appears to be the journalistic backstage of producing political commentary programs. This includes, for instance, the practice of party leaders designating specific politicians to participate in television debates (resulting in viewers repeatedly encountering the same public figures), the deliberate invitation of politicians with strong or controversial opinions (intended to heighten emotions and, consequently, increase viewership), as well as the communicative competence and media aptitude of politicians (their ability to adapt to the specific nature of television as a medium). Numerous mechanisms influence the airtime access of politicians in public broadcasting and merit broader examination—an analysis, however, that exceeds the scope of this article.

The purpose of this article is to present how legal regulations concerning equal access of politicians to public media are reflected in practice, in this case within regional public television. An essential aspect of the present analysis is its focus on the practical application of relevant regulations in regional media, as opposed to national broadcasters. This perspective constitutes the

principal analytical framework adopted by the authors. Within the broader discourse on the politicization of public media, the study seeks to answer the following question: Do regional broadcasters, by offering diversified socio-political content, effectively implement legal provisions ensuring equal access of politicians to public media? Furthermore, does this practice reflect internal pluralism within the public broadcaster? The working hypothesis assumes that in the context of ongoing debates on the politicization of public media, regional media — in contrast to national ones — may delineate the limits of political interference in journalistic and political commentary programs, striving to serve the public interest through professional journalistic objectivity. The analyzed example illustrating this assumption is the program “Och, ta polityka” (‘Oh, That Politics’), broadcast by TVP Gdańsk.

From a methodological perspective, the study employs a case study approach, focusing on the aforementioned program “Och, ta polityka” (‘Oh, That Politics’), broadcast by the regional branch of the Polish public broadcaster, TVP Gdańsk. Additionally, a limited discourse analysis has been applied to illustrate the problem of alleged politicization of public media.

Public Media: Politics, Autonomy, Law

The Importance of Public Media in a Democratic Society

For a long time, a debate has been ongoing worldwide on models of financing, and even more broadly, on the rationale and purpose of the functioning of public media (Willimas, 2005, p. 64-85). The discussion, the points of conflict, and the discourse concerning their mission and service are recalled, among others, by K. Jakubowicz, who emphasises the broader context of this debate: “The debate on public media goes far beyond the most frequently raised topics of politicisation, methods of financing, procedures for appointing management, commercialisation, etc. In fact, it is

a debate about the ideological and cultural foundation of society, and about the role of the state and the public sector in meeting the needs of individuals and society as a whole—in short, about the vision of society and the values prevailing in it” (Jakubowicz, 2007, p. 47).

In public media, in opposition to commercial media, emphasis is placed on the mission and service, meaning the necessity of universal accessibility, catering to the tastes of various audiences, serving the public interest, working for the benefit of society, neutrality, and pluralism (Jakubowicz, 2007, pp. 154–180). According to D. McQuail, the functioning of public broadcasters is considered one of the few ways to defend against the imperfections of media markets (McQuail, 2007, pp. 192–193).

Of particular scrutiny and tension is the pluralism of views and opinions on socio-political issues presented by public media, as well as the representation of politicians within them. Referring to the analysed case of the television programme “Och, ta polityka” (‘Oh, That Politics’), one should note the frequently different points of reference emerging in national and regional public media. Regional public media complement the programming offer of national public media and often enter into relationships of tension and agenda differences with them. The role of regional public television is particularly evident here: although formally part of a single public broadcaster, its organisational structure (local TVP stations) grants it a certain degree of autonomy—for example, in content selection, thematic emphasis, and the manner of implementing the public mission at the local level (Jakubowicz, 2007, pp. 231–237; Kuca et al., 2018). In political or social matters, the narrative of regional media may differ from the national message, which is sometimes interpreted as an expression of pluralism within the public broadcaster. In practice, this means that regional public television may highlight topics important to local communities, which in national coverage appear only marginally or are entirely omitted.

The importance of public media in a democratic society is also emphasised by numerous European Union documents. As early as 2004—more than two decades ago—the report adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe concluded that public media are an important component of the democratic system in Europe. The report also called on EU member states to ensure the existence of strong and healthy public media capable of meeting the demands of the digital age. According to the report, this is necessary in the face of threats from political and economic forces, competition from commercial media, concentration, financial problems, and dynamic technological changes (Public Service Broadcasting, 2004). Today, in an era of such rapid technological acceleration and political change, the challenges faced by public media are much greater. The protection of their proper functioning is guaranteed by law.

Legal Regulations: Equal Access of Politicians to Public Media in Poland

The emergence of public media and a pluralistic media system in Poland was made possible by the political transformation of 1989. These changes abolished the system of mass media organisation shaped in Poland after the Second World War, which, in general terms, was characterised by “the functioning of mass information media as an instrument of exercising power by the monopoly party” (Pepliński, 2007, p.9).

The new media order in Poland was established amid disputes between political parties, which, on the one hand, sought to secure their own commercial media, and on the other, to guarantee access to the newly created public media. As M. Miżejewski summarises: “It was precisely the electronic media, and above all public television, that became, in the era of political transformation, a particularly coveted asset for politicians and political parties. Legally guaranteed access to airtime constituted, for the coalition, an instrument of effective governance, and for the

opposition, a public forum for criticising the authorities in order to seize power” (Miżejewski, 2015, p. 110).

The legal basis for changing the public media system consisted of: the abolition of censorship (Act of 11 April 1990 on the Repeal of the Act on the Control of Publications and Public Performances and the Abolition of the Control Authorities; Act Amending the Press Law) and the abolition of the state monopoly in broadcasting (Act of 23 November 1990 on Telecommunications). The idea of public media emerged gradually. In the first drafts prepared by the parliament and government in 1990–1991, the terms “public television” and “state television” often meant the same thing (Jakubowicz, 2007, p. 208). The Broadcasting Act (u.r.tv.) was passed by the Sejm only on 29 December 1992. As M. Różycka summarises: “Work on the Act lasted over two years, and its final shape was the result of many, sometimes not the most fortunate, compromises. Ultimately, however, on the basis of this Act, one of the most dynamically developing media markets in this region of Europe was established in Poland” (Różycka, 2013, p.18).

The organizational structure of the Polish public broadcaster, although slightly modified in recent years, currently comprises sixteen regional centers (including the Gdańsk branch), the Television Information Agency – TVP Info and TVP Parliament, as well as channels such as TVP3, TVP+ (TVP VOD), TVP Sport, TVP Polonia, the Television Theatre, and TVP Wilno. Furthermore, the thematic offer of Polish Television (Telewizja Polska) is implemented through specialized channels, including TVP1 (Polish Television 1), TVP2 (Polish Television 2), TVP Serials, TVP Entertainment, TVP Culture, TVP Culture 2, TVP History, TVP History 2, TVP Documentaries, TVP HD, TVP Science, and TVP Women, TVP ABC (children’s programming), TVP ABC2, and Alfa TVP (youth programming).

The Broadcasting Act separated the commercial and public media sectors, imposing on the latter the duty to fulfill the public mission. According to Article 21 of the Broadcasting Act: “Public radio and television shall carry out a public mission by offering, on the terms set out in the Act, to the entire society and to its individual parts, diverse programmes and other services in the fields of information, current affairs, culture, entertainment, education, sport, characterised by pluralism, impartiality, balance and independence, as well as innovation, high quality and integrity of the message.”

In the context of political communication and pluralism, several articles of this Act should be recalled. These include: Article 22(2) (enabling supreme state bodies to present and explain state policy directly); Article 23(1) (providing political parties with the opportunity to present their positions on key public issues); Article 23(2) (enabling trade unions and employers’ organisations to present their positions on key public issues); and Article 24(1) (ensuring that election participants and electoral committees can broadcast information programmes).

The term “key public issues” is legally recognised as subject to interpretation: “Public broadcasters therefore evaluate the justification for granting political parties access to programmes based on the value of the public issue to be presented. However, it should be noted that there are no specified criteria for such an assessment” (Niewęłowski et al., 2021). J. Sobczak indicated that these are “issues of a fundamental, essential, or crucial nature—in short: the most important and significant matters for the state and society. Examples include issues concerning: defence, the political system, the system of government, the education system, the economic model, international relations, pacts, treaties, alliances, financial commitments, public sentiment, attitudes

toward cultural goods, religious issues, and the assessment of the functioning of state institutions” (Sobczak, 2001, p. 325).

Detailed rules governing access for politicians, political parties, trade unions, employers’ organisations, as well as election participants and electoral committees (including exact airtime and scheduling) are set out in the Regulation of the National Broadcasting Council of 24 April 2003, as amended multiple times. It also stipulates that public radio and television units are obliged to submit quarterly reports—both in writing and electronically—to the National Broadcasting Council on the fulfilment of their obligations to ensure equal access to public media for the above-mentioned entities.

Another legal act worth recalling is the Act of 27 June 1997 on Political Parties (u.p.p.). Article 5 of this Act states that political parties shall have access to public radio and television. A political party, according to the u.p.p., is a voluntary organisation operating under a specific name, whose aim is to participate in public life by influencing state policy or exercising public authority by democratic means. The legal foundation for defining a political party is set out in Article 11 of the new Constitution of the Republic of Poland, adopted on 2 April 1997. At the same time, Article 13 prohibits “the existence of political parties whose programmes refer to totalitarian methods and practices of nazism, fascism, and communism, as well as those whose programmes or activities assume or allow racial and national hatred, the use of violence to seize power or influence state policy, or foresee the concealment of structures or membership” (Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997).

The Constitution introduced freedom of the press and other mass communication media as a constitutional principle (Article 14) and guaranteed the freedom to express opinions and to acquire and disseminate information (Article 54). As M. Miżejewski summarises: “The adoption

of the new Constitution constituted, among other things, the sanctioning of fundamental guarantees of media freedom, understood as a basic instrument for the proper functioning of a democratic state governed by the rule of law” (Mizejewski, 2015, p. 109).

Practice of Politicians’ Access to Public Media Airtime

In practical terms, the access of political parties to public media is realised not only at the level of nationwide media, but also local media (Mielczarek, 2007). In the Tri-City area, the task of producing programmes presenting the views of political party representatives rests with Radio Gdańsk and the Gdańsk branch of Polish Television (TVP Gdańsk). The case study in this article consists of an analysis of the practice of granting parties access to public media, carried out by TVP Gdańsk within the framework of the current affairs programme “Och, ta polityka” (‘Oh, That Politics’). The selection of the Gdańsk branch of Telewizja Polska and the program “Och, ta polityka” (‘Oh, That Politics’) results from the fact that the concept and production of the program were prepared and conducted by one of the co-authors of this paper. This issue will be discussed and analyzed in detail in the subsequent sections of the article.

Conditions for the Creation of the Programme “Och, Ta Polityka”

The beginnings of the programme’s broadcast date back to March 2024 and were a consequence of the parliamentary elections held on 15 October 2023. The takeover of executive power by the coalition Civic Coalition–Third Way–The Left (Council of Ministers headed by D. Tusk) on 13 December 2023 led to changes in the management of public media in Poland, as well as significant programming changes in their operation (Krawczyk, 2023). It was decided that public media should not act as the government’s PR agency but should inform the public reliably and impartially about political and social processes taking place in the country and abroad (Musiałek, 2024). A

practical expression of this concept of change was, among other things, the closure of TVP's main news programme "Wiadomości" and its replacement with a new format entitled '19:30', along with changes to the editorial team and the rules for programme production.

Similar changes also occurred in local branches. At TVP Gdańsk¹, the new management decided that the existing programme guaranteeing political parties' weekly access to the media, "Wywiadówka" ('parents' evening'), authored by editor M. Rakowiec, would be replaced with a new format. A novel and experimental idea emerged—to entrust the creation and hosting of the programme to a person from outside the media (not a journalist), but with a significant level of substantive knowledge, experience in organising and moderating pre-election debates, and more than twenty years of practice in media cooperation as an expert. In early February 2024, a meeting took place between the management of the Gdańsk branch of TVP and Dr. Jarosław Och, a political scientist from the University of Gdańsk specialising in political theory and the Polish political and party system.

During the meeting, the Gdańsk academic received an offer to collaborate with TVP Gdańsk in creating an original programme concept and was invited to host it. Technical and logistical issues (set design, lighting, sound, editing, camera work, production, promotion) were left to TVP Gdańsk. The political scientist accepted the proposal to design the programme concept

¹At TVP Gdańsk¹ On 2 January 2024, by decision of the Minister of Culture, B. Sienkiewicz, M. Wałuszko was appointed Director of the Gdańsk branch of TVP.

and present it on air. He proposed the title “Och, ta polityka” (‘Oh, That Politics’)², which, firstly, was a playful reference to his somewhat distinctive surname, and secondly, alluded to the widespread public aversion to politics and politicians. It should be noted that TVP Gdańsk also implements political parties’ access to its airtime in its daily news programme Panorama and in the current affairs programme Czyżewskiego 42. The specific feature of “Och, ta polityka” (‘Oh, That Politics’) was to be its in-depth political analyses and discussions between party representatives on current national and regional political issues

Programme Concept: Substantive and Logistical Dimensions

Substantively, four main rules and principles for the programme were agreed upon:

1. Autonomy of the author in selecting the programme’s topics;
2. Freedom to choose programme guests, within the representation guidelines of parliamentary parties;
3. Live broadcasting of the programme;
4. Inclusion, once a month, of representatives of youth wings of political parties (as a consequence of the high turnout—69%—among young voters in the 2023 elections and the desire to create a platform for listening to the voice of the younger generation) (Sawka, 2024).

²The programme is available on the TVP Gdańsk website at: <https://gdansk.tvp.pl/76261061/och-ta-polityka> (accessed: 22 July 2025).

Additionally, it was agreed that the programme would provide (in accordance with the journalistic ethics applicable at TVP) a space for substantive and cultured exchange of views, free from negative emotions, and upholding principles such as mutual respect and refraining from discriminatory behaviour or attitudes (Journalistic Code of Ethics in Telewizja Polska S.A., 2015). For the host, as well as for the management of the Gdańsk branch of TVP, an important challenge was not only to guarantee each invited guest the right to speak but also to ensure impartiality and equal treatment of programme participants. It was agreed that guests would be representatives of parties present in the Sejm at the beginning of the parliamentary term.

It was also decided that the first episode of the new programme would air on the first Monday of March 2024 and that it would be broadcast weekly (except for religious holidays and the summer break) from 17:50 to 18:25 (duration: 35 minutes) in TVP Gdańsk's regional slot. A repeat of the programme was scheduled for early Tuesday afternoons. The rule was adopted that each programme would cover two topics: one nationwide and one regional/local, and that five guests would be invited to each episode—corresponding to the five parliamentary clubs represented in the Sejm at the start of the term: Law and Justice, Civic Coalition, Third Way, The Left, and Confederation. It was also agreed that each episode would feature either an expert's short statement (*setka ekspercka*) or a street poll addressed to residents of the Tri-City concerning the programme's topic. Furthermore, it was agreed that the programme's author would submit, in the week preceding each Monday broadcast, a programme outline to the station's management, specifying the topics, invited guests (by name), and recommendations regarding the recording of the expert statement or street poll.

Exceptions to the agreed rules were permitted in the event of high-profile political events in domestic or international politics.

In practice, “special editions” were aired in three circumstances:

1. Post-election Mondays (local elections 2024, presidential elections 2025);
2. In autumn 2025, during a flood in south-western Poland, in connection with a nationwide aid campaign for flood victims;
3. On anniversaries of the assumption of power at central or local government level.

The participants of post-election programmes were not politicians but journalists from Tri-City media (press, radio, television) specialising in Polish political affairs. These episodes focused on post-election commentary and outlining the political consequences of voters’ verdicts.

In the programme addressing the flood and assistance to those affected, participants included parliamentary party representatives, as well as a TVP Gdańsk journalist who reported to viewers and guests on the flood realities after visiting the disaster areas.

The anniversary programmes featured both parliamentary party representatives and local government officials. In November 2024, six months after the assumption of local government power, the mayors of the Tri-City—A. Dulkiwicz (Gdańsk), M. Czarzyńska-Jachim (Sopot), and A. Kosiorek (Gdynia)—were invited. Guests also included the leaders of smaller Pomeranian towns such as Tczew, Lębork, Starogard Gdański, Kwidzyn, and Czersk. Their presence was linked not only to the commemorative nature of these episodes but also fulfilled the mission of promoting the region and acquainting viewers with its issues.

However, the essential and primary standard was to broadcast “Och, ta polityka” (‘Oh, That Politics’) with the participation of politicians representing parliamentary parties (mainly Pomeranian MPs and local councillors), addressing current national and local political issues. While the preparations for the first episode were accompanied by considerable emotions and

uncertainty regarding the participation of Law and Justice representatives (in their view, public media had been taken over illegally, hence their boycott of TVP programmes), in subsequent episodes there were no significant problems. Between 4 March 2023 and 23 June 2024, a total of 56 episodes were broadcast, with more than 100 guests invited. While the first episodes had an audience of about 42,000 viewers, within a few broadcasts this rose to around 60,000, reaching a peak of 80–90,000 viewers³.

Main Programming Challenges

During the preparation and broadcast of the programmes, there was no shortage of substantive challenges that needed to be addressed. One of them was ensuring equal access to participation in the programme for all representatives of parliamentary parties. A seemingly simple task took on a particular dimension, considering that parliamentary groups often comprised multiple individual political parties—for example, the Civic Coalition consisted of members from four political parties (Civic Platform, Polish Initiative, Modern, and the Greens), the Third Way from two (Polish People’s Party and Poland 2050), the Left from three (New Left, Polish Socialist Party, Labour Union), and the Confederation from two (New Hope and the National Movement).

³ Data obtained from the TVP Gdańsk Advertising Office (in the author’s possession).

Thus, the challenge was not only to ensure participation by representatives of all these entities but also to provide them with a comparable amount of airtime.

In practice, ensuring perfectly equal airtime proved difficult; however, the programme's author adhered to the principle that no political entity should be discriminated against in terms of access to airtime.

To verify this assumption, independent calculations were made of the time used by representatives of political parties on "Och, ta polityka" ('Oh, That Politics') in February 2025 (four episodes aired that month) and in March 2025 (five episodes aired). For example, on 3 February 2025, a Law and Justice representative spoke for 8.16 minutes, a Civic Coalition representative for 5.43 minutes, a Third Way representative for 6.83 minutes, a Left representative for 4.3 minutes, and a Confederation representative for 2.5 minutes. On 10 February 2025, Law and Justice had 8.15 minutes, Civic Coalition 4.51 minutes, Third Way 4.40 minutes, and Confederation 5.37 minutes (on this occasion, the Left's representative withdrew at the last minute for health reasons). On 17 February 2025, Law and Justice spoke for 7.25 minutes, Civic Coalition 5.35 minutes, Third Way 4.1 minutes, the Left 5.46 minutes, and the Confederation 4.31 minutes. On 24 February 2025, Law and Justice had 3.21 minutes, Civic Coalition 5.06 minutes, Third Way 2.54 minutes, the Left 3.56 minutes, and the Confederation 4 minutes.

The monthly total for February 2025 was: Law and Justice – 26.77 minutes; Civic Coalition – 20.35 minutes; Third Way – 17.87 minutes; the Left – 13.32 minutes (no representative in one programme); Confederation – 16.18 minutes⁴.

⁴All data are based on the author's own calculations, carried out on the basis of an analysis of airtime in the programme Och, ta polityka broadcast in February 2025.

- In March 2025, five episodes aired, with speaking times as follows:
- 3 March – Law and Justice 4.35 min; Civic Coalition 4.55 min; Third Way 3.45 min; the Left 4.30 min; Confederation 7.40 min;
 - 10 March – Law and Justice 6.50 min; Civic Coalition 4.05 min; Third Way 2.40 min; the Left 3.20 min; Confederation 5.20 min;
 - 17 March – Law and Justice 5.45 min; Civic Coalition 5.30 min; Third Way 3.50 min; the Left 3.25 min; Confederation 4.15 min;
 - 24 March – Law and Justice 6.25 min; Civic Coalition 4.20 min; Third Way 5.35 min; the Left 3.25 min; Confederation 3.55 min;
 - 31 March – Law and Justice 3.45 min; Civic Coalition 4.30 min; Third Way 5.30 min; the Left 3.20 min; Confederation 4.15 min.

The monthly total for March 2025 was: Law and Justice – 27.3 minutes; Civic Coalition – 23.2 minutes; Third Way – 21.15 minutes; the Left – 18 minutes; Confederation – 25.25 minutes.

In conclusion, according to the conducted measurements, representatives of the largest opposition party in the lower chamber of the Polish Parliament (Sejm) — namely, the Law and Justice party (PiS) — appeared on the program most frequently. This outcome stemmed from the author of the program's commitment to ensuring that opposition politicians could express their views on socially significant issues freely and without time constraints — a principle largely absent

in TVP broadcasts between 2016 and 2023. A second factor was the author's emphasis on high substantive quality and the communicative competence of PiS representatives. At the same time, it should be noted that representatives of the largest governing coalition party, the Civic Platform (PO), appeared equally often, with the difference of approximately ten minutes of airtime over two months resulting mainly from their comparatively lower verbal and substantive competence levels. It is also worth emphasizing that in live programs, ensuring strictly equal airtime for all participants is inherently difficult due to the dynamic nature of the format and the desire to prioritize the most substantive contributions. Any minor discrepancies in airtime distribution among parties are usually not the result of deliberate editorial bias. The program "Och, ta polityka" ('Oh, That Politics') exemplifies such marginal temporal disproportions.

Another issue requiring the programme author's response was the departure (in October 2024) of the Together Party (Partia Razem) from the Left's parliamentary group, which automatically placed this formation in opposition and created the need to take this into account when compiling guest lists. From autumn 2024, the programme therefore featured not only representatives of the Left but also those from the opposition Together Party. Attention to such seemingly small details reflected the consistent effort to fully guarantee parliamentary parties' participation in discussions broadcast on TVP Gdańsk's "Och, ta polityka" ('Oh, That Politics').

A few actual examples:

- On 15 April 2024, guests included: M. Kołodziejczak (Civic Coalition MP), K. Szymański (Confederation), M. Horała (Law and Justice MP), M. Rutka (Left), and K. Trawicki (Third Way/Polish People's Party). Topics: the idea of two-term limits for mayors and the second round of the Gdynia mayoral election;

- On 13 January 2025, guests included: S. Rybicki (Civic Coalition senator), M. Urbaniak (Confederation), M. Rutka (Left), P. Karczewski (Law and Justice regional councillor), and W. Tomczak (Third Way/Poland 2050 MP). Topics: a political summary of 2024 and the phenomenon of so-called hate speech in Polish politics;

- On 9 June 2025, guests included: J. Wałęsa (Civic Coalition MP), D. Mazur (Confederation), J. Banach (Gdańsk Left councillor), K. Smoliński (Law and Justice MP), and A. Dziambor (Third Way/Polish People's Party). Topics: political consequences of K. Nawrocki's presidential election victory and the 30th anniversary of the first democratic local elections.

Conclusions

In the political process, public media are situated between “independence and submission” (Jędrzejewski, 2007, pp. 335–349). In Poland, they have long been the subject of debates concerning their independence and the fulfilment of the public service mission. Numerous analyses of public television in Poland indicate that its coverage of political events exhibits a strong bias towards the ruling party, which undermines its function as a source of impartial information (Mazur 2019). In this context, the role of regional public media—including local television—is particularly important. Reaching audiences interested in the activities of politicians and politico-social organisations in the region, their opinions, news and current affairs programming often differ from the nationwide message. The programme “Och, ta polityka” (‘Oh, That Politics’) meets the legal requirements placed on public media with respect to political parties’ access to airtime and constitutes a significant space for debate on Polish and international politics. It is also a lasting component of TVP Gdańsk’s programming offer, oriented towards high journalistic standards such as accuracy, objectivity, and equal treatment of representatives of all current parties.

Public media—especially regional channels—have the potential to play a key role in democratic political communication: as a source of reliable information, moderators of public debate and institutions supporting civic engagement. Their effectiveness, however, depends on safeguarding independence from political influence and on the ability to adapt to the challenges of the digital age. Without these elements, public media may become instruments of propaganda rather than platforms for social dialogue.

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