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"THIS USED TO BE YOUR FAVOURITE SHOW". INVOLVEMENT OF THE MEDIA IN THE PROTEST "MEDIA WITHOUT CHOICE" AND ITS PUBLIC PERCEPTION ON THE BASIS OF SELECTED EXAMPLES

Dominika Popielec

PhD, The Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Faculty of Political Science and Journalism
ORCID: 0000-0002-9583-0861

Abstract

In a democratic system we are used to the media reporting on various demonstrations and social protests. Thanks to the media's interest protesters have the opportunity to express their position regarding actions that they consider to be unjust. On one occasion, Polish media took advantage of this situation when they expressed their own opposition to a state of affairs by ceasing to publish media content. Instead of the scheduled programmes there appeared the messages: "This used to be your favourite show" and "Media without choice". In view of this, the aim of this article is to describe this one-day protest by part of the media on 10th February 2021, which was motivated by a proposed bill that would introduce a tax on advertisements. The reactions of the political sphere, the media and society, which constitute how the protest was perceived, are analysed with reference to how the reception of the media protest was portrayed. Use is made of an analysis of the content of selected media in relation to these analytical categories, a comparative method and a case study.

Key words: journalism, media protest, media without choice, Polish media system, politics

Introduction

It may seem that we have already grown used to the visibility of varied social protests, since they are intrinsically linked to the essence of democracy. However, one must not forget that society has also expressed its opinion in this way in undemocratic societies, often in difficult circumstances and against the disapproval of the authorities. Andrzej Paczkowski draws attention to such examples in his analysis of “[...] case where group, spontaneous and public forms of social resistance/protest/dissent were manifested [...]”¹ in Polish society in the times of the Polish People’s Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, PRL). Piotr Matczak points out that protests, which may take on many forms, including petitions, strikes and demonstrations, appeared on a broad scale in Poland after 1989.² Over more than thirty years of democracy in Poland, there have been many protests that drew the attention of the media and, consequently, society. Almost everyone has protested – professional groups, such as doctors, nurses, teachers, miners, farmers, businessmen and women, as well as various social groups, including parents and the carers of disabled people, opponents of judicial changes, supporters and opponents of abortion, individuals who identify with the Committee for the Defence of Democracy (Komitet Obrony Demokracji, KOD), opponents of pandemic restrictions, Swiss bank mortgage holders and listeners of the radio station “Trójka”. Of course, these protests have been accompanied by various slogans, symbols and other forms of communicative-polemical expression appropriate to the object of the protest which, on the one hand, build the identity of the protesters and, on the other, express clearly – often in an unconventional form – their values, beliefs and expectations with ready-made solutions intended to bring about the desired changes. According to Zbigniew Kloch, this arises from the nature of the protest treated as a social practice that aims for visibility, and thus clarity through the use of forms of expression³ present in the public space and through the media.

Taking into account that protests and demonstrations are extremely varied, one thing is clear: society takes full advantage of the opportunity to publicly express its opinion and defend its reasoning. Although it is impossible to list all the initiatives by citizens intended to contest the *status quo* and demand changes, it is worth giving a few examples from recent years that have stirred up considerable interest and emotions in society. One of these is the farmers’ protest, which society associates with tractors blocking the roads, grain being poured on

¹ A. Paczkowski, *Strajki, bunty, manifestacje jako „polska droga przez socjalizm”*, Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, Poznań 2003, p. 21.

² P. Matczak, *Protest lokalny w Polsce*, “Ruch Prawniczy, Ekonomiczny i Socjologiczny” 2000, R. LXII, z. 3, p. 151.

³ Z. Kloch, *Hasła strajku kobiet i języki wernakularne*, “Pamiętniki Literackie” 2022, nr 1, p. 118.

to the streets and with the protest leaders, Andrzej Lepper and Michał Kołodziejczak.⁴ Researchers' observations suggest that the origin of the farmers' protests since 1989 should be sought primarily in the economic rationales and those of the political transformations, in the context of which expectations were formulated concerning the protection of the agricultural market accompanied by a large amount of support from the state. Farmers made use of various types of protest action, sometimes radical, which secured society's perception of them.⁵ One can consider the Black Protests, which have been organised in many Polish cities by Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (OSK, the All-Poland Women's Strike)⁶ since 2016, to be an equally striking form of protest. These protests oppose planned changes in the Act that concerns family planning, the protection of human foetuses and the conditions in which pregnancies may be terminated.⁷ The catalyst for this activity was the rejection in 2016 of a bill proposed by the committee "Save Women", which concerned the liberalisation of the abortion law and was accompanied by a heated debate in parliament, fragments of which were published in the media.⁸ This relatively quickly created the need for opponents to show their dissent, for which they used the model of the 1975 women's strike in Iceland.⁹ This initiative, which was also promoted on social

⁴ J. Ceglarz, *Protest na A2. „Nowy Lepper” przywódcą rolników*, Wp.pl, 13.12.2018, <https://finanse.wp.pl/protest-na-a2-nowy-lepper-przywodca-rolnikow-6327032934782593a> [accessed: 29.05.2023]. It should be pointed out that the farmers' discontent is a quick response to the political, economic and social situation and is of a permanent nature. Evidence for this is the numerous protests over a long period of time depending on the circumstances, for example the fertiliser crisis and issue of surplus Ukrainian grain, reported by the media; K. Doros-Stachoń, *Protest rolników w Opolu. „Magazyny są pełne zboża i jest problem, żeby to sprzedać”*, Radio Opole, 25.04.2023, <https://radio.opole.pl/100,697526,protest-rolnikow-w-opolu-magazyny-sa-pelne-zboza> [accessed: 29.05.2023].

⁵ It is worth highlighting that the researchers Krzysztof Gorlach and Grzegorz Foryś have described the types of agriculture protest from a historical perspective, taking into account the specific characteristics of agricultural dissent in Poland since 1989, including waves of protests (Solidarity and post-Solidarity), the interests of agricultural producers, and the repertoire of actions, such as blocking the roads, destroying crops, strikes, strike alerts and occupying buildings. K. Gorlach, G. Foryś, *Ruchy społeczne jako instrument walki o sprawiedliwość społeczną. Kilka refleksji na przykładzie protestów (nie tylko) polskich rolników*, "Więś i Rolnictwo" 2023, nr 1(198), pp. 66–68.

⁶ OSK is an organisation founded in 2016 in response to the government's rejection of a pro-choice bill "Save Women", mentioned later.

⁷ G. Piechota, „Strajk Kobiet”. *Zmiany społeczno-kulturowe jako efekt protestów w Polsce*, "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2022, R. 20, z. 3, pp. 98–99.

⁸ Zob. *Sejm odrzucił projekt komitetu „Ratujmy kobiety” liberalizujący przepisy aborcyjne*, RMF FM, 23.09.2016, https://www.rmfm24.pl/fakty/polska/news-sejm-odrzuca-projekt-komitetu-ratujmy-kobiety-liberalizujac,nId,2279607#crp_state=1 [accessed: 30.05.2023].

⁹ This reference, which comes from the website Gals4Gals, appeared in the description of the event on Facebook, which said "Like the fearless women of Iceland who paralysed the country 41 years ago, on 3rd October 2016 women all over Poland will come out on to the streets to fight for their basic rights" in: J. Gunnarsson Payne, *Kobiety jako „lud”*. *Czarne Protesty jako sprzeciw wobec autorytarnego populizmu w perspektywie międzynarodowej*, [in:] *Bunt kobiet. Czarne*

media¹⁰, generated a lot of support as well as declarations of intent to take part. This turned out not be a one-off event because similar initiatives took place in subsequent years, for example the protests during the 2020 pandemic after the Constitutional Tribunal's verdict regarding abortion¹¹ and protests following the deaths of pregnant women.¹² These demonstrations were accompanied by slogans, symbols and placards¹³, which became inseparable elements of them, while at the same time communicating extremely forcefully their opposition to the political decision of the Constitutional Tribunal and the opponents of abortion.

To this rich catalogue of social protests of various natures and motives one should add those who not only drew society's attention to dissenting voices, but also reported on them, namely, the media. Therefore the aim of this article is to describe this unprecedented media protest in Poland in terms of its genesis, motives, slogans and symbols, as well as how it was received by various groups, including the media industry itself, the political sphere and public opinion. In connection with this, the following research questions were posed: Why did the

protesty i Strajki Kobiet, red. E. Korolczuk, B. Kowalska, J. Ramme, C. Snochowska-Gonzalez, Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, Gdańsk 2018, p. 171.

¹⁰ M. Drozdek, *Jednego dnia kobiety sparaliżowały cały kraj. Teraz powtórzy się to w Polsce?*, Wp.pl, 26.09.2016, <https://kobieta.wp.pl/jednego-dnia-kobiety-sparalizowaly-caly-kraj-teraz-powtorzy-sie-to-w-polsce-6041161842828417a> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

¹¹ J. Suchomska, D. Urzędowska, *Działania protestacyjne Strajku Kobiet w ujęciu teorii nowych ruchów społecznych*, "Dyskurs & Dialog" 2021, nr 1, p. 12.

¹² Zob. D. Flis, *Ani jednej więcej. Dziesiątki tysięcy w Warszawie, kolejne protesty w całej Polsce*, OKO.press, 6.11.2021, <https://oko.press/ani-jednej-wiecej-protesty-po-smierci-izabeli-z-pszczyny-aktualizowany> [accessed: 30.05.2023]; *Protesty po śmierci 30-latki z Pszczyny. „Ani jednej więcej. Marsz dla Izy” [RELACJA NA ŻYWO]*, Onet.pl, 6.11.2021, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/protesty-po-smierci-30-latki-z-pszczyny-relacja-na-zywo/m1ngtx1> [accessed: 30.05.2023]; KP, *Nie przeprowadzono aborcji, kobieta zmarła. W całej Polsce milczące protesty pod hasłem „Ani jednej więcej”*, "Newsweek", 2.11.2021, <https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/spoleczenstwo/smierc-kobiety-w-pszczynie-protest-pod-tk-w-warszawie-ani-jednej-wiecej/mb0d95k> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

¹³ Adrianna Krzywik lists the slogans of the protesters, which make reference to cultural, historical and political contexts. However, while it would be preferable to provide some examples, these mostly rely on Polish puns and as such are untranslatable without cumbersome and space-consuming explanations. She also lists the symbols used, namely, the umbrella, coat hanger and bolt of lightning. Furthermore the protesters made use of the logotype of the Solidarity movement, the *kotwica* ("anchor") which was the symbol of the Polish Underground State used during WWII, as well as Margaret Atwood's book *The Handmaid's Tale*. A. Krzywik, *Dekodowanie komunikatów wizualnych sztuki protestów przeciwko zaostrzeniu praw aborcyjnych w Polsce*, "Dyskurs & Dialog" 2021, nr 1, pp. 114–117. In Sławomir Doległo's opinion, the use of symbols and specific language (including vulgar expressions) situates these protests within the tradition of the anti-government carnival akin to the Orange Alternative movement of the 1980. S. Doległo, *Pokolenie Netflix. Skarnawalizowany gniew młodych Polaków i jego medialne (re)prezentacje*, [w:] *Media-język-społeczeństwo. Stan badań i aktualne problemy*, red. D. Popielec, K. Marcinkiewicz, Polskie Towarzystwo Komunikacji Społecznej–Instytut Dziennikarstwa, Mediów i Komunikacji Społecznej Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków–Wrocław 2021, pp. 138–144.

media decide to protest? How did they express their arguments? How was the media protest received? In the context of the last question, since we wanted to sketch society's perception, which was just forming, the analytical categories "solidarity with the protesting media" and "criticism of the media protest" were used. In order to show the spectrum of these categories, reports written by the chosen media were analysed and use was made of a comparative method along with a case study.

The genesis, course and significance of the "Media without choice" protests

Above we noted, using selected examples, that protests can have various reasons, messages, locations, forms and reach. What these protests have in common is how they were reported by the media, as well as the progressive mediatisation of civic activism through the use of social media. It is precisely thanks to the media that consumers have the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the message of the protesters, which influences the social reception of a specific event. The images that we most frequently see in the media are groups of protesters, their chants and placards, which point to the protesters' desire to articulate their own opinion according to the idea "nothing about us, without us". Since so many social groups decide to protest, it should come as no surprise that people in the media take advantage of the opportunity to express their dissent, for example, in the form of open letters, petitions and media reports aimed at a broad group of consumers. As an example, one could cite the most recent defence of media independence against government pressure which took the form of a declaration that was signed by many editors-in-chief of various media outlets¹⁴

¹⁴ The chief editors declare their total opposition to any pressure placed on the independence of the media, which has already been exerted on the editors of outlets including Onet and Wirtualna Polska. The case of lex TVN (a law, vetoed by the president, that was intended to prevent companies from outside the European Economic Area from having more than a 49% stake in Polish radio and television stations – translator's note), legal action against journalists as well as the activity of the National Broadcasting Council have also not been forgotten. The editors declare publicly that they will defend fundamental journalistic values and will fulfil the role of the media (provide society with access to information, perform the function of an overseer), because this has special significance for a democratic society. The full list of editors for Redakcja Wiadomości WP, *Deklaracja redaktorów i redaktorów naczelnych*, Wp.pl, 28.06.2023, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/deklaracja-redaktorow-i-redaktorow-naczelnych-6913597122914976a> [accessed: 28.06.2023]. This declaration, given the opportunity, is also supported by journalists, including the editor of TVN Anita Werner, who, on her Instagram profile, took the side of "[...] free and independent media [...]. Dear Viewers, you have the right to know", MOS, „*Macie prawo wiedzieć*”. *Anita Werner popiera deklarację mediów*, Wp.pl, 28.06.2023, <https://teleshows.wp.pl/macie-prawo-wiedziec-anita-werner-popiera-deklaracje-mediow-6913846253738720a> [accessed: 28.06.2023].

after the publication of texts on the portals Onet and Wirtualna Polska concerning attempts to influence editorial offices.¹⁵

Without doubt, these declarations and open letters can be considered a form of protest because they express collective, spontaneous and public opposition/resistance, which, according to Paczkowski, quoted above, takes place in the media, instead of on streets and in squares, which other social groups use.¹⁶ Citing Magdalena Tendera, a protest is “not only a situation where the expectations and demands of social actors confront each other and resources are created and transformed, but also a tool for the transformation of axiological systems, which takes place in relation to the legitimised apparatus of power. It serves as a response to a situation where the social order is disturbed.”¹⁷

Regarding the genesis of the protests, it should be explained that at the beginning of 2021 prime minister Mateusz Morawiecki announced a draft bill to introduce a levy on traditional and online media. In practice, this was another tax that was intended to finance Narodowy Fundusz Zdrowia (the National Health Fund; 50% of the revenues) in the battle with the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, Narodowy Fundusz Ochrony Zabytków (the National Fund for the Protection of Monuments; 15% of revenues) as well as the establishment of a Fundusz Wsparcia Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego w Obszarze Mediów (Fund for the Support of Culture and National Heritage in the Media Sector; 35% of the revenues).¹⁸ It was established that the levy on internet advertising would amount to 5% of the base¹⁹, which would generate revenues of 800

¹⁵ Journalists spoke directly about government pressure that appeared after the publication of articles, mostly investigative ones, that unmasked the activity of MP Łukasz Mejza, who is linked to the Republicans and held the position of secretary in the ministries within Zjednoczona Prawica (the United Right) coalition government, as well as pressure to dismiss particular journalists, such as Andrzeja Stankiewicz from TVP in 2007. M. Bojanowska, *Wicenaczelný Onetu: Zona Ziobry, próbowała mnie zwolnić z każdej redakcji, w której pracowałem*, *Gazeta.pl*, 28.06.2023, <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114883,29916132,wicenaczelný-onetu-zona-ziobry-probowala-mnie-zwolnic-z-kazdej.html> [accessed: 28.06.2023].

¹⁶ J. Chodak, *Okupacja przestrzeni publicznej jako taktyka współczesnych ruchów protestu*, “Przestrzeń Społeczna” 2016, nr 1, pp. 75–77.

¹⁷ M. Tendera, *Protest jako mechanizm równoważenia nierówności społecznych*, “Kultura i Społeczeństwo” 2013, nr 2, p. 112.

¹⁸ According to the Ministry of Finance, the proposed bill was based on ideas implemented in France, Austria, Greece and Italy. *Podatek od reklamy. Morawiecki: Składki w mediach nie są naszym nowym w UE*, “Dziennik Gazeta Prawna”, 3.02.2021, <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/8084884.podatek-od-reklamy-morawiecki-obajtek.html> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

¹⁹ According to the draft bill, “The basic rate for the press shall be 2% for revenues that do not exceed 30 million zł and 6% for revenues above this amount – after deducting the tax-free allowance and if the subject of the advertisement is goods that meet the qualifying criteria, these rates shall be 4% and 12% respectively. In the case of media other than the press the basic rate shall be 7.5% on revenues that do not exceed 50 million zł and 10% if revenues exceed this amount – after deducting the tax-free allowance and if the subject of the advertisement is goods that meet the qualifying criteria, these rates shall be 4% and 12% respectively.” Furthermore, it is worth drawing

million zł in 2022. Comments on the draft bill could be submitted until 16th February 2021.²⁰ The government's plans did not pass unnoticed, since the media immediately became interested in the topic, as attested by publications that raised this issue, such as "Dziennik Gazeta Prawna"²¹, the portal Business Insider Polska²² and Onet.pl.²³ In addition to articles of an informative nature, on the day before the planned protest the editor-in-chief of the weekly "Polityka", Jerzy Baczyński, spoke up, expressing, in the name of the media and advertising industries, his opposition to the planned advertising levy and announced, somewhat enigmatically, "protests of a form and scale, the likes of which Poland, and even the European Union, have never seen". Baczyński described exhaustively the negative effect of the levy on the financial situation of many parts of these industries operating in the conditions of a frozen economy due to the epidemic restrictions, which translated into serious financial difficulties, for example for the press market and the events industry.²⁴

In Baczyński's opinion, these were conscious political actions by the government intended to "bring order to the media market" in line with the Hungarian model, which through this bill would financially weaken so-called opposition media, while strengthening so-called national and patriotic media as a result of creating a special Media Fund.²⁵ Baczyński

attention to the regulations concerning the Fund for the Support of Culture and National Heritage in the Media Sector, which thanks to this tax would be able to realise such aims as "building a platform for distributing information and analysing material that appears in the media, particularly digital, establishing and developing channels and news platforms (radio and news programmes, internet portals) aimed at people with varying digital capabilities, supporting the development of the media, promoting national heritage, Polish cultural and sporting achievements as well as the development of radio and cinematography.", *Projekt ustawy o dodatkowych przychodach Narodowego Funduszu Zdrowia, Narodowego Funduszu Ochrony Zabytków oraz utworzeniu Funduszu Wsparcia Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego w Obszarze Mediów*, gov.pl, <https://www.gov.pl/web/premier/projekt-ustawy-o-dodatkowych-przychodach-narodowego-funduszu-zdrowia-narodowego-funduszu-ochrony-zabytkow-oraz-utworzeniu-funduszu-wsparcia-kultury-i-dziedzictwa-narodowego-w-obszarze-mediow2> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

²⁰ P. Huczko, *Podatek (składka) od reklamy internetowej – projekt*, Infor.pl, 5.02.2021, <https://ksiegowosc.infor.pl/wiadomosci/5190610,Podatek-skladka-od-reklamy-internetowej-projekt.html> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

²¹ *Podatek od mediów nabiera kształtu. Projekt trafił do wykazu prac rządu*, "Dziennik Gazeta Prawna", 2.02.2021, <https://serwisy.gazetaprawna.pl/media/artykuly/8082939,podatek-od-mediow-zalozenia-kto-zaplaci.html> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

²² *Podatek od reklamy. Znamy założenia projektu ustawy*, Business Insider, 2.02.2021, <https://businessinsider.com.pl/biznes/media/podatek-od-reklamy-zalozenia-projektu-ustawy/s0wfw3q> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

²³ *Nowy podatek od reklam. Pieniądże trafią do mediów publicznych?*, Onet.pl, 3.02.2021, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/nowy-podatek-od-reklam-pieniadze-trafia-do-mediow-publicznych/752g5bz> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

²⁴ J. Baczyński, *Protest mediów*, "Polityka", 9.02.2021, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/komentarzejerzegobaczynskiego/2103115,1,protest-mediow.read> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

placed his hopes in the protest, which would deter the government from the proposed law.

On this basis it can be inferred that the economic factor, so significant during the difficult time of the coronavirus pandemic, proved to be the impetus for the media protest, leaving its mark on the overall financial condition of the media and advertising markets in Poland. This economic factor is of great significance to the functioning of the media, ensuring independence from any form of pressure or political influence. Furthermore, it allows high quality material to be produced that is important from the point of view of the interests of society. In view of this, the “Media without choice” protest, which took place on 10th February 2021, was conducted through the media and lasted 24 hours, stands out against the backdrop of other media activity. On this day, media consumers were able to experience – speaking somewhat dramatically and apocalyptically – “a world without media”, since instead of well-known news programmes on radio or television, familiar front pages in the press and on online portals, one saw a black background or heard the messages “This used to be your favourite show”, “This should be your favourite news programme. Today we are showing a special version of the programme in view of the ‘Media without choice’ protest. We apologise to our viewers and trade partners. Thank you for your understanding and support” (message shown on Polsat).²⁶ One can see how the protest appeared from a visual point of view thanks to a gallery of 32 photographs published by Onet that show the front pages of the press, online portals and television stations. In all cases we see black with the slogan “Media without choice”, a short description of the protest and an invitation to read a letter.²⁷ Dissent was expressed in various ways, beginning with not publishing/broadcasting material in media that had signed a letter to the Polish government and political groups, through cases where other media – often local – joined them for the duration of the protest, to informing consumers about the protest action. Every form of support and solidarity confirmed the need for those who work in media to speak in one voice.

In social media the slogan of the protest was circulated as #mediabezwyboru (#mediawithoutchoice) or #protestmediów (#mediaprotest). A tweet by Mateusz Sosnowski from the television channel TVN will serve as an example, since, on the one hand, it drew attention to consumers’ familiarity with the media and the fact that they take media reports for granted, and, on the other, to the looming threat which became the trigger of the protest of some parts of the media: “8531 editions of @FaktyTVN, non-stop, every day. Today the 8532nd edition didn’t

²⁶ *Czarne tło, brak sygnału telewizyjnego. Trwa protest „Media bez wyboru”, “Wprost”, 10.02.2021, <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/10420190/czarne-tlo-brak-sygnału-telewizyjnego-trwa-protest-media-bez-wyboru.html> [accessed: 30.05.2023].*

²⁷ Analysis based on the article “Media bez wyboru”. *Czarna środa w sieci, telewizji, radiu i prasie [ZDJĘCIA]*, Onet.pl, 11.02.2021, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/media-bez-wyboru-protest-mediow-i-czarne-ekrany-galeria-zdjec/g1mw617> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

take place. Because the government wants to bring in extortion money, which may ruin free, independent media. And without free, independent media there's no democracy. Without diverse media there's no choice. #MEDIABEZWYBORU."²⁸ The reach of the protest is evidenced by statistics, which show that the hashtag #MEDIABEZWYBORU was used 441 million times, which is unprecedented for the Polish digital landscape.²⁹ This is because the media protest dominated both traditional and the online media space.

In the case of such press publications as "Gazeta Wyborcza", "Fakt", "Dziennik Gazeta Prawna" and "Rzeczpospolita", it was decided either to make the front page of the edition black or to publish a letter to the government of the Republic of Poland and leaders of political groups that supported the so-called advertising levy.³⁰ At this juncture it would be worth quoting some passages from this letter which suggest that the proposed tax on advertising is "simply extortion money that targets Polish viewers, listeners, readers and internet users, as well as Polish productions, culture, leisure, sport and media."³¹ It was also explained in detail that this would disturb pluralism in the media due to the deteriorating financial position of the media, which could disappear from the market, cause a fall in the quality of reports, and, finally, increase the advantage of public media, which is subsidised by the tax payer, over private media. At the same time it was pointed out that at present the media fulfil their current tax obligations and conduct charitable activities.³² The letter was signed by many broadcasters and publishers from the industry³³, but not public media, the foundation Lux Veritatis (Radio Maryja, Telewizja Trwam) and the media group Fratria, which publishes such titles as "Sieci", wPolityce.pl and wPolsce.pl; these outlets supported the ruling camp to a greater or lesser extent.

The media protest was visible beyond Poland's borders because foreign publications reported on it, particularly what the essence of the protest was, the slogan as a means of communication, who had joined it, what its origin was, and

²⁸ M. Sosnowski, tweet from the day 10.02.2021, https://twitter.com/mat_sosnowski/status/1359568150929547264?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1359568150929547264%7Ctwgr%5Ef9b48289f98e8cf85f1015cdf0695ca96538ff26%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2F [accessed: 30.05.2023].

²⁹ *Akcja Media bez wyboru z rekordowym zasięgiem w sieci*, Onet.pl, 11.02.2021, <https://www.onet.pl/informacje/onetwiadomosci/media-bez-wyboru-akcja-polskich-mediow-z-rekordowym-zasięgiem-w-sieci/yp1cm01,79cfc278> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

³⁰ T. Mincer, *Media bez wyboru. Portale, telewizje, rozgłośnie i prasę pokryła czerń*, "Forbes", 11.02.2021, <https://www.forbes.pl/gospodarka/media-bez-wyboru-o-co-chodzi-w-protestach-mediow-przeciwko-podatki-od-reklamy/nyknmhg> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

³¹ Redakcja Gazety Wyborczej i Wysokich Obcasów, *Protestujemy, bo władza wypowiedziała wojnę wolnej opinii publicznej*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 10.02.2021, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75968,26771136,protestujemy-bo-wladza-wypowiedziala-wojne-wolnej-opinii-publicznej.html> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

³² *Ibidem*.

³³ List of broadcasters and publishers see: *ibidem*.

the main provisions of the draft bill. These publications include Politico³⁴, “The Guardian”³⁵ and Deutsche Welle.³⁶ Thus the editor of “Polityka” Baczyński predicted accurately that foreign editorial offices would take an interest in the protest of the Polish media.

The media protests and reactions of the media and political spheres: from solidarity to criticism

Politicians of the ruling camp argued in favour of the draft bill, while those of opposition parties opposed it. Voices of support and dissent among the political class were quoted both by media that identified with the protest³⁷ and those that criticised the action taken.³⁸ The noticeably polarised political sphere was written about by editors such as Monika Olejnik, who compared statements made by such Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Law and Justice) politicians as Deputy Marshal of the Sejm Ryszard Terlecki, who said that this is “a special protest because media who support the opposition are protesting”, as well as president Andrzej Duda, who claimed that “this is not a question of freedom of speech, but of money.”³⁹

³⁴ For example the article: W. Kość, *Polish media suspend reporting to protest planned tax on advertising*, Politico, 10.02.2021, <https://www.politico.eu/article/polish-media-suspend-reporting-to-protest-a-planned-tax-on-advertising> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

³⁵ “The Guardian” article on the protests quoted Polish media, for example “Gazeta Wyborcza”, and illustrated the text with a photograph of the black front page of this newspaper and the Polish slogan “Media without choice”. J. Henley, *‘This used to be your favourite show’: Polish media stage blackout protest*, “The Guardian” 10.02.2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/feb/10/polish-media-hold-blackout-in-protest-at-tax-threat> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

³⁶ To illustrate the article a black banner was used that could be seen on the website of “Gazeta Wyborcza” along with the slogan “Media without choice” and a small amount of text warning the reader of a possible scenario where the publication could disappear because of the introduction of the advertising levy. Readers were also encouraged to familiarise themselves with a letter to the Polish government (in Polish). In addition, a screenshot of a Tweet by Fakt.pl was displayed in Polish. kmm/dj, *Poland: Media offline for 24 hours in protest*, DW, 10.02.2021, <https://www.dw.com/en/poland-media-goes-offline-for-24-hours-to-protest-ad-tax/a-56524758> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

³⁷ Editor Michał Wróblewski collected statements by the PiS party that opposed the protest, as well as unclear messages of their coalition partners, i.e. Jarosław Gowin’s Porozumienie (Agreement) party and Solidarna Polska (United Poland). A statement made by Waldemar Buda from the PiS party will serve as an example. He stated that “in Poland on the day on which independent media protested there was ultimately... peace and quiet”, which was in line with the communication strategy of this group. M. Wróblewski, *Podatek od mediów. PiS pod presją uderza w dziennikarzy, koalicjanci się dystansują*, Wp.pl, 11.02.2021, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/podatek-od-mediow-pis-pod-presja-koalicjanci-dystansuja-sie-od-premiera-6606708799470272a> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

³⁸ PiS politicians critical of the media protest expressed their opinions in media that did not support the protest action. This was public media and media that supported the ruling camp.

³⁹ M. Olejnik, *Panie prezesie, białe jest białe, a czarne jest czarne*, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 11.02.2021, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75968,26778149,panie-prezesie-biale-jest-biale-a-czarne-jest-czarne.html> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

Besides critical voices and ones that distanced themselves from the media protest, politicians were quoted who supported the rationale of some editorial offices and spoke in unison with them. As examples one can mention statements made by politicians such as Borys Budka from Platforma Obywatelska (PO, Civic Platform) who said that "Anyone who tries to gag free media is afraid of scrutiny. Taxing the media is an attempt to muzzle it and strikes at the very heart of democracy."⁴⁰ Another example is Michał Kobosko from Polska 2050, who expressed his support for the protest as follows: "Total solidarity with the protest of Polish media. Their audiences must understand that it is they who stand to lose the most from the transformation of television, newspapers and portals into clones of TVP and Orlen media."⁴¹ It should be emphasised that to a large extent politicians of different persuasions expressed their opinion using social media, because, due to the form of the media protest, it was precisely the internet, and more specifically the social media Twitter and Facebook, that became the only means of communication. Support for the media protest did not escape the attention of foreign politicians. One of them was Madeleine Albright who wrote on Twitter that this is "an attack on democracy and the rule of law."⁴²

Making reference to a report of the Institute of Media Monitoring, it should be observed that this protest action enjoyed a great deal of interest and was dubbed "the unification of editorial offices from across Poland"⁴³, although there were a few exceptions. The absence of specific signatures from the letter of 40 Polish broadcasters and publishers prompts us to highlight that public media and those affiliated with the ruling camp were critical of the "Media without choice" protest. To illustrate the stance of the media that did not join the protest, a few examples have been selected to show their attitude towards it. Public media devoted a lot of attention to this undertaking, for example in one text that appeared on the portal TVPInfo.pl the journalist compared the protests to a disinformation campaign and criticised them for the comparisons to "a new period of martial law" that were being made. In his opinion, this action should be understood as an attack on the proposed law using emotions, a suitable message and the interests of foreign media. He reminded readers that the advertising levy would enhance

⁴⁰ I. Szpala, J. Dobrosz-Oracz, *Opozycja chce, by Sejm przyjął uchwałę broniącą wolne media*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 11.02.2021, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,26775238,opozycja-nie-dla-haraczu-na-media.html> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

⁴¹ *Ibidem*. The state broadcaster and media owned by energy giant Orlen were well known for reporting biased towards in favour the ruling PiS party.

⁴² M. Albright's Tweet: "As someone who cares deeply about Poland, I am alarmed at this latest effort by the Polish government to stifle free media. We must call this out for what it is – an attack on democracy and the rule of law", tweet from the day 10.02.2021, <https://x.com/madeleine/status/1359280569050406915?lang=en> [accessed: 19.06.2024].

⁴³ Instytut Monitorowania Mediów, *Akcja „Media bez wyboru” jednoczy redakcje z całej Polski*, 11.02.2021, <https://www.imm.com.pl/akcja-media-bez-wyboru-jednoczy-redakcje-z-calej-polski> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

the cultural activities of organisations.⁴⁴ An analysis of reports by public media prompt us to claim, using TVP Info as an example, that the dominant element was criticism of the media protests which was built around the following argumentation: an advertising levy needs to be introduced in order to combat the effects of the pandemic, support digitalisation and worthwhile journalistic projects, political action, the battle between large corporations and the fight for cash.⁴⁵ Public media invited to the studio, or shared the opinions of, individuals who criticised the media protest, such as Adam Andruszkiewicz, who said that “this is unnecessary hysteria from the media that yesterday started to display black panels on their websites and screens”⁴⁶, or Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarność” chairman Piotr Duda, who called the protest “a festival of hypocrisy.”⁴⁷ These examples are an expression of the unambiguous criticism of the protest undertaken by part of the media and which, in Duda’s opinion, has insufficient justification, hence the comparison to “hysteria” and “hypocrisy”.

It was not only public media that pursued a discourse about the protest with a decidedly negative tone, since a similar narrative and argumentation appeared in media that were sympathetic towards the ruling camp. For example, in an article on the portal wPolityce.pl the columnist Stanisław Janecki, who writes for “Sieci”, described the protest as “aggro” caused by, in his opinion, “free media”, a term he used mockingly, which clearly shows his negative attitude towards the protest. To strengthen his message, Janecki suggested that the protesting media’s identifying themselves with freedom aligns with the standards adopted by the Russian newspapers “Pravda” and “Komsomol’skaya Pravda”, which carries extremely negative connotations. He criticised the use of black as a symbol of the protest and also claimed that the protesting media were deceiving their audience, which he expressed with the words “[...] they’re pulling the wool over viewers’, listeners’, users’ and readers’ eyes, they’re turning their brains to mush”. In Janecki’s opinion, the lack of substance in the protesting media was to be viewed positively due to the content they offered, which he compared to mediocrity “in terms of its appearance and everything else. Turning off this junk acted like a balm, like a filter and a sedative.”⁴⁸

⁴⁴ K. Karnkowski, *Media bez wyboru – czyli akcja dezinformacja*, TVP Info, 12.02.2023, <https://www.tvp.info/52267732/krzysztof-karnkowski-media-bez-wyboru-czyli-akcja-dezinformacja> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

⁴⁵ FA, MNIE, *Walka o „kasę potężnych koncernów”*. „Sieci” o kulisach akcji #MediaBezWyboru, TVP Info, 15.02.2021, <https://www.tvp.info/52301482/media-bez-wyboru-kulis-akcji-i-walki-o-kase-potecznych-koncernow-kto-zorganizowal-akcje-i-o-co-w-niej-chodzi> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

⁴⁶ MK, MNIE, *„Nikt nie zamierza cenzurować mediów. To fake news i dezinformacja”* [WIDEO], TVP Info, 11.02.2021, <https://www.tvp.info/52246333/podatek-zagraza-wolnosc-mediow-adam-andruszkiewicz-nikt-nie-zamierza-cenzurowac-to-fake-news> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

⁴⁷ TM, KF, *Przewodniczący „S” oburzony protestem mediów. „Festiwal hipokryzji i obłudy”*, TVP Info, 11.02.2021, <https://www.tvp.info/52249152/protest-mediow-przewodniczaczy-solidarnosci-piotr-duda-wydal-oswiadczenie> [accessed: 30.05.2021].

⁴⁸ S. Janecki, *op. cit.*

The opponents of the media protest and the fact that they did not identify with its message were written about by the media portal Wirtualemedia.pl, which gathered the opinions of individuals linked to such media as the weekly “Sieci”, “Gazeta Polska”, “Gazeta Polska Codziennie”, public media, Dorzeczy.pl and Weszło. This group included people who unambiguously criticised the protest as well as people with a neutral attitude towards it. For example, in the first group one could place a statement made by Marzena Nykiel on the portal wPolityce.pl: “What if the media lie about their own affairs and manipulate facts to protect their own interests? This protest has nothing to do with freedom of speech!”⁴⁹, and one by Jacek Karnowski (the founder of wPolityce.pl): “We do not know if this is basically ridiculous nonsense of the former owners of the Third Polish Republic, whose pride has been hurt and who feel threatened by the need to pay a relatively low solidarity fee, or a serious attempt, a desire to break a government weakened by the pandemic and internal divisions.”⁵⁰ Both remarks denied the motives of the protests.

The media protest and types of social reactions: selected examples

The media protest also met with the support of different social groups, among whom one can find both well-known public figures and “ordinary citizens”, who have in common that they are consumers of the media. An analysis of publications such as “Gazeta Wyborcza” in February 2021 allows one to claim that they are sympathetic towards the media’s demands, in particular the wish to defend themselves against the negative consequences of the proposed fee, which would contribute to a lack of financial stability affecting independence from forms of pressure. Articles in the newspaper included voices of support, for example that of journalist and social activist Jerzy Owsiak, who wrote on Facebook that “There is no free country without independent media. There is no freedom without freedom to choose. That’s why we’re fighting for plurality and diversity of media in Poland. And above all – for the right to choose for you – our listeners.”⁵¹ Gestures

⁴⁹ S. Kucharski, „Sieci”, „Gazeta Polska” i „Do Rzeczy” przeciw „Mediom bez wyboru”. *Sakiewicz: od dziś popieram dwa razy większy podatek*, Wirtualne Media, 11.02.2021, <https://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/artykul/wpolicy-pl-sieci-gazeta-polska-do-rzeczy-przeciw-mediom-bez-wyboru-sakiewicz-od-dzis-popieram-dwa-razy-wiekszy-podatek> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ Owsiak displayed this message during a live broadcast on Facebook. M. Wojtuczek, *Media bez wyboru. Trzaskowski, Anja Rubik, Owsiak, Pałac Kultury. Kto poparł protest niezależnych mediów?*, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 11.02.2021, https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,26774309,policycy-modelki-youtuberzy-jerzy-owsiak-wielki-protest.html?_ga=2.178590180.1518318071.1688045589-2040606062.1688045589&_gl=1*1xzl28n*_gcl_au*NTI5MjYzNy4xNjg4MDQ1NTg5 [accessed: 30.05.2023].

of solidarity were also shown by the model Anja Rubik, the youtuber Rafał Gębuś, the cabaret artist Michał Pałubski, as well as an institution, the Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, which extinguished its lights as a sign of solidarity with the protesting media.⁵² Of course, these are only a few examples of the types of support shown in various forms by public figures.

Support for the “Media without choice” protests was expressed by the readers of publications including “Gazeta Wyborcza” and people who associated themselves with the OSK. It is also worth mentioning that this particular type of protest, which used media space, moved thanks to media consumers to the public sphere, and an example of this was a demonstration on 11th February 2021 (the day after the protest) which numbered over 100 people and took place in front of the headquarters of public television at 19:30, that is, while the news programme Wiadomości was being aired. The crowd expressed their solidarity with the protesting media and also opposition to public television, using the slogans “TVP lies” and “TVP, gives us back our 2 billion.”⁵³ Similar protests took place in cities such as Wrocław,⁵⁴ and a similar event was organised by the Women’s Strike in Szczecin outside the offices of “Gazeta Wyborcza” as a follow-up to the media protest. One of the initiators of the protests argued that the OSK were on the side of free media, like the time when it was the media that supported their demands. The slogans on the placards and the cries that accompanied the protesters were: “Free media”, “If there are no free media then there is no democracy and freedom!” and “The Chief Office for the Control of the Press, Publications and Performances. President: Jarosław Kaczyński.”⁵⁵ This last slogan is all the more telling as it alludes to the central state censorship office of the previous undemocratic political system that was the Polish People’s Republic. Therefore, it was an example of a bidirectional solidarity

⁵² *Ibidem*.

⁵³ W. Karpieszuk, *Media bez wyboru a „TVP łże”. Protest przed telewizją narodową w obronie niezależnych mediów*, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 11.02.2021, https://warszawa.wyborcza.pl/warszawa/7,54420,26776524,protest-przed-tvp-w-obronie-niezaleznych-mediow-siedziba-telewizji.html?_ga=2.212743636.1518318071.1688045589-2040606062.1688045589&_gl=1*1p07wqi*_gcl_au*NTI5MjYzNy4xNjg4MDQ1NTg5 [accessed: 30.05.2023].

⁵⁴ A participant in the Wrocław protest in defence of the media said, “We’re here at this silent protest to show our solidarity with those silent media which are inconvenient for the authorities. We’re fighting for citizens’ rights because each of us has the right to choose and to access information”, UJ, MAG, *Media bez wyboru. Wrocławianie protestowali w obronie niezależnych mediów, policjanci legitymowali manifestantów*, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 13.02.2021, https://wroclaw.wyborcza.pl/wroclaw/7,35771,26786185,media-bez-wyboru-protest-wroclawian-w-obronie-niezaleznych.html?_ga=2.251491398.1518318071.1688045589-2040606062.1688045589&_gl=1*x8etbi*_gcl_au*NTI5MjYzNy4xNjg4MDQ1NTg5 [accessed: 30.05.2023].

⁵⁵ A. Stanuch, *Media bez wyboru. Strajk Kobiet w Szczecinie wspiera walkę o wolną prasę. „Śq z nami i przedstawiają fakty”*, “Gazeta Wyborcza”, 11.02.2021, https://szczecin.wyborcza.pl/szczecin/7,34939,26776854,strajk-kobiet-wspiera-walke-o-wolne-media-sa-z-nami-i-przedstawiaja.html?_ga=2.240991555.1518318071.1688045589-2040606062.1688045589&_gl=1*pvlr-dq*_gcl_au*NTI5MjYzNy4xNjg4MDQ1NTg5 [accessed: 30.05.2023].

protest. It should also be observed that the protesters created their own slogans which were used during the gatherings. They made reference to the fundamental values of the democratic system, which corresponds to how Tendera understands the concept of protest. Specifically, this led to a confrontation between the expectations and demands of citizens who supported the "Media without a choice" protest and the government's proposal to impose an advertising levy. Furthermore, the protest was meant as a tool, as editor Baczyński rightly observes, intended to transform the attitude of the ruling camp towards the media.

There was also no lack of articles devoted to the opinions of the readers of "Gazeta Wyborcza". On the basis of these 22 reader comments one can conclude that they supported the media protest, for example "I support the protest. Seeing how the press could look without free media gives everyone food for thought. Well done all free media for taking action together" (nataliajazon); they felt the lack of material that was usually published every day, for example. "It is difficult for me to manage without you from early morning, but I understand" (asso12), and they assumed that such a situation could become real, for example "To all of those who are rebelling because other articles are blocked: this is how things will look in a few months when there aren't any free media anymore" (Portos). As one of the symbols of the protests, the black front pages made a significant impression on readers, which the tone of the following comments attests to: "Media without choice and everything became quiet, dark and empty. Things I take for granted, such as reading my horoscope, looking for new sports news – everything, doused in black paint, disappeared. And we were left alone" (Kasia); "Today we hung up a poster supporting your protest in the window of our flat. Since we're ordinary citizens that's all we can do. You are our last resort"⁵⁶ (Maria and Andrzej Musielak).

Support for and solidarity with the protesting media was also expressed in the form of internet memes. There appeared altered versions, with political connotations, of one of the slogans, "This used to be your favourite country" on a black background inside the outline of Poland. There were references to martial law: "And so on 10th February 2021 the younger generation found out how things were when Jaruzelski announced martial law in 1981. They also have a demo version of the world where all the media belong to the government. Do you like it?". There were even allusions to Polish cinematography, using the example of the famous 1981 film "Miś" (Teddy Bear) – "There is no TVN or Polsat. There is TVP and TVP Info."⁵⁷ Naturally, this does not exhaust the forms

⁵⁶ A. Gąsiorowska, Ż. Gotowska, B. Salonek, *Tak mogą wyglądać strony gazet, jeśli tego nie zatrzymamy. Walczmy o wolne media dla nas i naszych dzieci*, "Gazeta Wyborcza", 11.02.2021, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,162657,26775542,tak-moga-wygladac-strony-gazet-jesli-tego-nie-zatrzymamy-walczmy.html> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

⁵⁷ *Media bez wyboru: tym razem komentarze nie do śmiechu [MEMY]*, Onet.pl, 11.02.2021, <https://www.onet.pl/styl-zycia/onetfacet/media-bez-wyboru-internauci-komentuja-memy/ys1e-n9,86cd1308> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

of support for the protests and solidarity shown by consumers, since it serves only to exemplify reactions and aspects such as freedom of the media, citizens' right to information, media pluralism and the role of the media in democracy.

For balance, it is also worth quoting the reactions, which were in the minority, of the consumers of those media who did not identify with the message of the protest. For example, users of the portal wPolityce.pl (51 comments) were critical of both the protest itself and of the media that supported it. There were comments in which the main slogan of the protest was modified, e.g. "media without honour" (edmund); satisfaction because of the lack of a broadcast schedule, for example "This really was a nice day. Without 'Divorce. The battle for everything', 'Hidden Truth', 'Ugly Betty', episode 5342, 'Pawn Shop. Life under Pledge'. This is the menu. Fodder for Poles. Take it once and for all and get lost" (veto). Among those comments that blatantly criticised the "Media without choice" protest, there were also those that condemned editor Janecki for his article since he was unsympathetic towards the protest, e.g. "Drivel, tovarishch Janecki. If you want to destroy freedom you must try harder" (BratBartosza), and there was also media polarisation "So there is a division between us, the good ones from TVP and them, the bad ones, who are in the service of other states. So-called free media. The situation really seems to be heading towards one where all media expect state media will be abolished. It smells very bad"⁵⁸ (Mirek). On this basis, it can be claimed that media consumers critical of the protest identified with the argumentation presented by editors.

Conclusions

Editor Jerzy Baczyński was right in his claim that the media protest provoked wide social interest due to its unconventional form, which relied on not publishing material other than the slogan "Media without choice", the messages "This used to be your favourite show", "This should be your favourite news programme", a black background on the front pages of the press and television, not broadcasting radio programmes, publishing a letter to the government of the Republic of Poland and political groups, and hashtags in social media. Using media space by limiting it solely to slogans and messages concerning the protest turned out to be an extremely effective solution compared to marches and protests reported on in the media, which are well known to us and predictable to a certain extent. On the one hand, such an unconventional form of

⁵⁸ S. Janecki, *Sześć lekcji z protestu pod hasłem „Media bez wyboru”, czyli o robieniu w bambuko, chlampie oraz walce z logiką i semantyką*, "wPolityce", 11.02.2021, <https://wpolityce.pl/forum/polityka/128-dyskusje-pod-publicacjami-dzialu-polityka/tematy/1467735-szesc-lekcji-z-protestu-pod-haslem-media-bez-wyboru-czyli-o-robieniu-w-bambuko-chlamie-oraz-walce-z-logika-i-semantyka-komentarze-publicacji> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

communication achieved reached a very broad audience, which was important to the protesting media, while on the other society experienced “a world without media”. It is also worth highlighting that society organised its own protests as a gesture of solidarity with the media, using their own slogans and placards, which strengthened the message. The protest was also noticed and commented on by those media that did not support it, but criticised it unequivocally. With reference to Zbigniew Kloch it should be stated that the visibility of the protest in the media was on a high level due to its distinctiveness and the well thought out way in which it communicated its message to society.

Significant support for the “Media without choice” protest – although there was no lack of critical voices, mostly from public media and those that sympathised with the government – as well as solidarity which extended beyond the borders of Poland, resulted in work on the bill being abandoned. At the same time a tense situation was eased, attested to by a statement that the Ministry of Finance published on their website, “Free and independent media are the cornerstone of democracy. This remains beyond any debate. Their freedom is guaranteed by existing legislation. No regulations concerning this have been modified”, while at the same time making the criticism that “the reaction of some media outlets and media conglomerates is inappropriate.”⁵⁹ This can be interpreted as an attempt to improve the image of the government due to international interest in the media in Poland, although it has been clearly stated that this form of expressing opposition to legislative proposals was not adequately foreseen by the ruling camp, which distinctly downplayed the arguments of the protesting media.

In conclusion, the “Media without choice” protest can be considered an unprecedented event due to the fact that it initially took place exclusively in media space, supported by the large majority of media thanks to its scope and the way in which it reached its audience. The protesters’ arguments and demands met with the considerable support of the majority of editorial offices in Poland, politicians from opposition parties in relation to the ruling PiS party, as well as society. With reference to the reflections of Magdalena Tendera, it should be stated that the protest clearly aligned with the confrontation of expectations and demands of some media that arose from their opposition to the advertising levy. Furthermore, the protest was intended to be a tool for transforming the plans of political decision-makers, and in practice turned out to be effective action because further processing of the bill was abandoned.

⁵⁹ *Ministerstwo Finansów wydało komunikat. Chodzi o podatek od reklam*, “Wprost”, 10.02.2021, <https://www.wprost.pl/polityka/10420431/ministerstwo-finansow-wydalo-komunikat-chodzi-o-podatek-od-reklam.html> [accessed: 30.05.2023].

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