MEDIATISATION OF DEMOCRACY – IS THIS THE END OF FREEDOM?

by Marek Górka

Modern information in large measure is based on the logic of consumption. This is because it is not the information itself and which decides about its value but it is its surroundings, and more specifically – its setting: the more impressive and striking the information, the more interesting for the media and for the spectators—the electorate. The mass of information not only limits the way of thinking but assimilating knowledge as well. The content is replaced by picture and form. Of course, widespread criticism of media is too simplified and accusations as well as allegations about their impact on the political life are slowly becoming truism.

Nevertheless, it is worthwhile remembering that media currently arouse the greatest interest in politicians, because they decide whether or not a given politician will be shown on the screen. This shows who holds power nowadays. Thus, are media a counterbalance for the government? It often turns out that media whose job is to control power and to disclose the abuse of it, become a part of the abuse themselves. Repeatedly, they

prove to be even more powerful than the government with which they closely cooperate. So is the political reality really democratic?

Unrestrained access to information is the basis of democratic functioning of the state. This is a historical fact, which proves that information independent of the influence of politicians is always in opposition to the dictatorship as they say “words are the first victim of the war”.

No matter whether it was the rampant inquisition in Europe with the list of forbidden books or subsequent totalitarianisms with their newspeak and censorship, it is always the authority – irrespective of its origin that tries to subordinate knowledge to its own purposes. Modern political regimes in Cuba, Belarus or North Korea in an analogous manner try to restrain the unhindered exchange of information. We won’t find there the Internet there and not due to technological delays but because it is the key to power and control of the media.

Each totalitarian system deprived of the control over the public sphere, sooner or later must fall down. Thus, there is fear of the contemporary dictators’ of the Internet, which is regarded as the IT medium of democracy. Unfortunately for political tyrants, the Internet knows no borders. So far however, the most important problem is not broadcasting independent information (which can be made outside borders of these countries), but their reception both in technological as well as psychological terms.

However, what constitutes the strength of democracy, can pose a threat to it. Media described as the „4th power”, pose an obstacle to freedom. What is worth noting is the condition of the modern „citizen-viewer” who “experiences bigger and bigger part of the world through the media, he acts as a go-between, he gets the world to his living room, (…) in the same place gets a nurses’ strike, the massacre in Urwland, the film with Johny Depp and information about the pilgrimage of Jean Paul II. Media convey everything. (…) We will pack everything, not only a processed cheese and margarine; we will pack also your love, your longing, your sorrow and your emptiness, everything in one hygienic parcel. Do not be afraid, you do not have to go through this alone, system will show you.”

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3 W. Klata, System 09, Polish Television, 2009.
Paradoxically, western democracies are calling the authoritarian regimes for ceasing the censorship of the Internet. Not so long ago the authorities controlled citizens through the control of information. Now, it is more difficult than ever. Technology gave people the possibility of forming a union, counteracting the authorities and controlling them. It can be said that the roles have changed.

So, how to set the border for the functioning of information in democratic reality? In other words, where should be the border between power and freedom and where is it? This question, therefore, is important, because the conflict between these two concepts (authority vs. freedom has always allowed not only to define the current political system, but above all has enabled the forming of social awareness.

As Michael Walzer notes „being a citizen today is mainly the role of passive: citizens are the viewers who vote”\textsuperscript{3}. Ironically, at this point, the Internet becomes a salvation for the vegetative lifestyle. Contemporary exchange of information makes that an entity so far weak may undermine the global balance, and the great corporation or a huge state-owned system becomes colossus on clay legs, which may stumble and topple over because of one piece of information. This dangerous and at the same time intriguing situation may be illustrated as follows: never before have the biblical David, and today a teenage hacker been so strong in the fight against Goliat, – that is a modern state equipped with specialists in each area. Today everyone may send a copy of information and present it to the entire world.

Not without reason media are being defined as the „fourth authority”, that is why it is worth undertaking the attempt to establish the boundaries of this power. However, I do not perceive the mere act of mass communication in the ethical-legal dimension, but in the aesthetic dimension. Because what, nowadays, attracts the attention of contemporary voters is the political theatre. The need to experience emotions and the desire of experiences of something interesting is so immense, that politicians and media select such a message which will have bigger poignancy. So instead of a press conference or a boring parliamentary session what we see on television is a politician standing on the pile of documents, or in possession of morally questionable gadgets.
The growing dominance of media increasingly provokes into some reflection about the state of not only the politics, but also the place of the aesthetics of public expression. Good taste and decency have become – speaking in an economics language – a scarce commodity, but the question which is worthwhile putting in the context of functioning of the modern democracy is whether this deficit is perceptible and whether there is a real demand for the presence of these values in public life? It is a huge bazaar, where one can get everything; a man finds fulfilment and is happy; the hypnosis of wealth and various constellations of colours, lights, like in the kaleidoscope, is drawing one into the illusion and does not let them leave.

In ancient times Herostrates set fire to the temple in Ephesus in order to become famous. Nowadays, nobody burns temples; however, fame and popularity are being won into an analogous manner. Extravagance in appearance and behaviour, abusive words, and everything that causes public scandal serves as a tool to achieve this goal. Here is a dilemma of a modern politician: Should I be remembered thanks to spectacular and striking statements, or should I present valuable content and condemn myself to oblivion? The key thing of political debates is dialogue between politicians, but in our reality the audience not only becomes an active participant of the debate but also an authority and a judge in the election duel. The same situation takes place in election campaigns, during which television debates become a reality show, in which one of candidates must leave „the Big Brother’s House”.

In this case, is it possible to talk about the freedom of expression and thus about the freedom of choice? Furthermore, one should put a question: what is the boarder of information, how to set it so that it doesn’t harm anybody but is a support for the rights and civil liberties.

It is difficult to answer that question clearly. The employees of media certainly are a guarantee that the mechanism of functioning of the democratic state works. Although, we can sometimes question the efficiency of that mechanism, it is the journalist who keeps an eye on the clerks doing and makes sure that there is some control over the authorities. On the

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other hand, excessive commercialization of public space caused that in most cases these messages, which are emitted in the first place, attract the largest number of customers, and marginalise these which could explain or indicate a problem. The magic of television corresponds to our everyday and trivial needs, which include also entertainment which cannot be ignored. What is increasingly noticeable is also marketing or making a show of politics. Serious, tragic events are presented next to trivial ones, or are related in light and informal style.

1. MANIPULATION AS AN ELEMENT OF THE FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

All people lie, because it allows the society to function. This is the feature that differentiates people from animals. This is the most popular and the most effective tool, which people use for their own purposes. It happens many times that our future depends on not telling the truth. Those who have ever written a letter of application or had a job interview know that very well. So there is not a human adult who has never lied. When we care about someone or something, we are trying to embroider, embellish the reality, what as a result, is distant from the truth. Politicians know about it, too and they lie to their electorate pretending that they are deeply concerned about them. They persuade the society that they are forever young, handsome and confident that they can do everything. This conviction and experience were the main foundations of the 20th century politics. People must, therefore, deal with this problem themselves. This is how we grow up to be able to assess other people, events, politics and history. Although we are aware that telling lies in public life is not fair and not ethical, this phenomenon exists and will always exist.

Lying should be criticized and marginalized, but it is impossible to entirely exclude it from the public life. The experience of systemic transfor-

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mation in Poland over the last 20 years has clearly illustrated, that creating democracy without lies is impossible. Still changing socio-economic situation, creativity of politicians, numerous political scandals, but first of all the festival of election promises clearly indicate that voters are mould by lies and they accept it.

Lying is a natural, human tendency and we will never be able to get rid of it, no matter how much we want it. Growing up one learns how to lie and how to best use it for him. This observation raises the question of whether the lie is not a natural outcome of social interactions and thus a product of human activity. Similarly, politics is a product of human practice at some stage of development. Both these aspects of human activity are related. However, it is hard to imagine, that politics could exist without lie, but it is relatively easy to admit that a lie can exist without politics.

What should be noted is an increasing role of political marketing not only during the election campaign, but throughout the political term. Daily presence of specialists on the public image in political life has become a fact. They are the creators of slogans, programs and political decisions, which could change a public feeling in give to understand that they are favour of a particular political party. Politicians cannot show that they do not care about their voters, so most of their activity is focused on making the impression of closeness and concern of the political elite. In conclusion, the balance of power in politics largely depends on the skills of manipulation.

Looking at political life in our country, it can be said that the fight between the biggest political parties show many ways the manipulation of the public opinion. One may have the impression that the politics means criticizing your opponents as much as possible. This phenomenon corresponds with the concept of politics „without the ideology” – described by Tadeusz Bodio, in which the main aim, is „the struggle to achieve and maintain power by observing the formal democratic procedures. (…)

the only goal of politics is to gain the political market, and above all the support of voters”8. The open-eyed observer inevitably comes to the pessimistic conclusion that the fundamental tool of political practice is manipulation, based on lies, frauds, criticism and discrediting.

The confrontation of lies and political promises with reality shows clearly the border between needs and desires. Spending cuts or tax increases certainly do not bring any supporters to the ruling team, hence probably such numerous lies in public speeches, and linguistic manipulations of all kinds. So are politicians irreversibly doomed to lies? After all, voters want to hear only nice and pleasant things, so politicians, somehow, try to provide them with these feelings. Everyone likes to hear nice things; we are fulfilling our desires, hopes and dreams in this way. In the world of media policy no politician will bring himself to announce conducting difficult –though necessary – changes. Paradoxically, it is not the fault of the politicians, but of the voters who don’t see the politicians as they really are, but as want to perceive them.

When it comes to promises, they are usually quantitative: roads, bridges, sport grounds, the increase of wages, etc., percentages concerning these spheres of life are forgotten. An economic miracle is a popular enough slogan, that it certainly will be reminded by all opposition parties. And, although such slogans helped to win elections sooner or later they will be a burden for the Civic Platform similarly to Leszek Miller’s words about the „pie in the sky”. Unfulfilled election promises are an easy target for political opponents and disappointed voters.

The researcher’s task is to demythologize an image of a party, as the effect of political manipulation; the clash with a negative image being confronted with an unfavourable image imposed by prevailing stereotypes, myths which are sustained by media.

Socialization is an extremely broad concept. A dictionary definition explains this concept as: „the process of creating and transferring knowledge, values, emotions, motivation and patterns of political behaviour by

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8 T. Bodio, Politics as the Art of Being Selected. [in:] Polish Political Scene, Electoral Campaigns, E. Pietrzyk-Zieniewicz (ed.), “Political Studies” 2002, No. 6, p. 47.
different subjects,, that an entity should assimilate in order to be knowledgeable and participate in political practice”

Politics used to be regarded not only as some kind of a cultural achievement in the process of the development of mankind, but besides religion, culture and law as one of many mechanisms controlling natural tendencies and human urges which do not always go hand in hand with ethics and morality. Thus, politics is some kind of a”relief valve” giving vent to social tensions and dissatisfaction.

Nowadays politics is closely associated with many spheres of the human activity, therefore, it is difficult to establish its borders. Consequently, it seems that the politics is now a fundamental factor that shapes attitudes, behaviours and the system of values of citizens. In addition, it leads to the regulation and stabilization of interpersonal relations. Starting with the Aristotle, finishing with J.J. Rousseau and J.S. Mill up to H. Arendt, all the scientists claimed that politics is a major and a wonderful recognition of human mind. But what to do and how to perceive current politics, which is based on lies?

Very often different ways to discredit political opponents are used in political fight. For that purpose, some attributes are added or some valuable features are taken away from the addressee of this criticism. Such is the task of any political formation to show an adversary in a bad light adding him some features tinged with something negative or by depriving him of some positive characteristics. The concept of discrediting includes lying and is regarded as one of the techniques of manipulating with political image. All kinds of manipulation have been present in politics since the moment that public activity started a long time ago.

That someone is being discredited can be intuitively sensed but it is an extremely complex phenomenon. There is a whole range of verbal tools to discredit political opponents, e.g. “to bring discredit on somebody”,” to behave dishonourably”,” to be exposed to ridicule”, “to ruin somebody’s

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reputation”, “to defame”, etc. Different possibilities of political embarrassment are inherent in politics.

The key thing in the phenomenon of discrediting opponents is the desire to damage their image. There are many ways to do this; all of them, though are to present the opponent in a bad light. No matter whether it is criticism, libel, lie or ridiculing, the aim is to undermine the credibility of the addressee and, consequently, deprive him of public trust.

It is obvious, that the political rivalry, in the conditions of democracy, has its rights and its own language. Political parties unscrupulously criticize their opponents for the views, which were previously their own views. So what does the war language serve? It is used to polarize the political arena, and—often wrongly—accuse their political opponent, in order to gain public support. Paradoxically, the political opponent becomes the point of reference for the party’s identity. Such a relationship, constructed on the principle of opposites, helps to clarify their own programme, specifies activities and mobilizes voters11. All this happens because the main objective of the opposition is to remove their political opponents from power.

It is difficult to find an area of life which remains in neutral in political disputes. Thus, discrediting starts to take the total nature12, this is a sign of the brutalisation of public life. Politics is the art of compromise and of fight. “In its nature politics, is sometimes brutal and its aim is the fight between the opposite parties which does not always concern the substantial facts”13. Ostensible kindness and mutual trust and respect may seem to prove a high level of political culture of the ruling elite, but in numerous, controversial situations there will always be heated and emotional disputes.

Language in politics often does not serve as a tool of reconciliation and finding a consensus, but as a tool of mutual antagonisms and a way to express bad feelings towards political opponents. It also shows that the

13 Ibidem, p. 53.
activity of political actors focuses more on mutual relations than on the description of the actual state of affairs. The aim of any manipulation is to achieve a desired reaction. „The objective of such dealings is to name people, goods and situations in such a way that they can be assessed and interpreted according to an arbitrary set of rules, so that the ruling team can take benefits and realize its objectives”

14. The fight based on the use of accusations is to expose the incompetence of the opposite party in order to disgrace them in the eyes of the public. Voters become spectators in the political theatre observing mutual fight. In this respect, every aggressive and brutal election fight attracts the greater attention of media what influences the election turnout. Paradoxically, discredit mechanisms tell more about the broadcaster than about the addressee.

The matter of political socialization is a still an opened question. The relative consolidation of certain rules of political rivalry provokes to reflect on the modern political system. Politicians through their decisions shape politics and indirectly also the identity of their voters. Political support not only allows noting the changes in the party system, but it is also a symptom of many other, deeper processes occurring in society. Politics in principle is multidimensional and for that reason it is worthwhile analysing the phenomena and processes that govern it. The latter requires from the researcher some broader analysis of political life and selecting those of its characteristics that seem politically irrelevant but have a significant impact on its shape.

How mass media function, their role and responsibility for what they say is a reflection of contemporary transformations of political systems. Analysing the subject of processes occurring in the media space, it is worthwhile taking into account the context of the existence of the tradition of democratic institutions in Poland. In some way the selection and the form of information materials is the measure of civilisation development of particular communities. It is a cliché to say that media determine functioning of contemporary democracy, and as it turns out they not only


create the political reality, but the attitudes and sympathies of the voters as well. Thus, it is important to bear in mind the relations between the authorities, society and the media.

Media play an important part in creating political topics in the Polish reality and their influence on the marginalization of political parties. What best illustrates this phenomenon is the dependence of political dirties on good relations with media, rather than a direct contact with the electorate. Thus, what becomes extremely important is: an analysis of the functioning of the political scene in the context of information management, working out the content of the information and the domination of elements of the combination of social engineering and political marketing.

2. INFORMATION IN THE PUBLIC SPACE

Not without reason media are being described as the „fourth power”, that is why we should try to establish borders of this power. The need for experiencing something interesting and emotional is so big that politicians and media choose the most powerful way of influencing the audience. Therefore instead of a press conference or the boring parliamentary debates, we have a happening with a politician standing on a pile of documents, or waving some morally dubious gadgets.

The above is a significant and important issue; firstly, because the aesthetics of expression is not defined by law, however, any attempt to its infringement is visible and intuitively felt and recognised. Whether something is aesthetic or not cannot be judged in legal terms, intuitively we feel that the aesthetics is violated, which gives way to multiple interpretations. To convince the spectators many methods are used: happenings, marches, demonstrations with a sophisticated selection of stage props, etc. All of those can offend the audience either directly or indirectly. This way of communication limits the response to it either to a similar type of action or to silence and ignoring the attack. A question arises, therefore in the context of aesthetics: do media fulfil their basic function, i.e. do they explain and help to understand the contemporary political reality?
I treat all the mass media, i.e. press, radio, television and the Internet on the same footing, because they all show the world in an infantile and frivolous way. The mass character of information causes that the media fight to attract the attention of the audience at all cost. Today the information itself is not enough, it must trigger emotions and entertainment.

The more variety of opinions is presented the greater confusion of the audience. How is a man to function in the modern world where media do not help to find the right way and our knowledge is built of impressions and emotions.

This happens because it is not information itself that decides about its value but it is the environment, the setting, according to the logic that the more impressive the news that greater attention media and what follows the viewers-voters devote to it. The abundance of information limits our way of thinking and ability to acquire knowledge verbally. Instead we are given pictures and shapes.

Contemporary media are treated as a source of entertainment, so nobody expects the content of to be serious and important. The 20th and the 21st century proved to us that information is a great entertainment commodity. Information services shown in the form of a video clip or a Brazilian series simplify and trivialize the reality. The main focus of the media is the economic profit and entertainment, which caused that both media workers, journalists and the audience lost their independence and objective autonomous judgement of the situation.

3. FREEDOM IN MEDIA DEMOCRACY

It can be noticed that despite many political and economic problems, people invariably idealistically expect politics to be an activity of enlightened and clever people who can reach compromise while taking decisions and that those who govern do it for the benefit of others and not to gain and maintain power. In each of the above cases we deal with hypocrisy. Words, words... Thus, maybe we should ask a question whether we are doomed to live in sheer hypocrisy. Certainly, there is no easy answer.
Media materials must be sufficiently attractive to find recipients, and in consequence the number of recipients becomes more important than the content.” If it happens that it is difficult to distinguish a fact from a report, it is because majority of demonstrations are being held in order to gain the largest possible number of reports in press and to make the best impression on the mass media, and consequently on the public.”¹⁶ Entering of the supply and demand’s rights into the world of politics and the increasing number of information sources results in the competition in serving information.

On the basis of the above considerations one can notice another alarming phenomenon. Well, it turns out that, in many cases, citizens perceive the democratic liberties as less important and they think that the liberties do not deserve concern, attention or protection. In contemporary democracy the freedom of choice comes down to unlimited consumption. The democratic system becomes a part of popular culture, fuelled by growing commerce. Thus civil liberty becomes obsolete or even embarrassing. This is illustrated by the process of gradual marginalization of political culture by mass culture. Independent thinking is displaced by media illustration whose task is creating the needs; the next step is manipulation. When the distinction between fact and fiction, culture and kitsch in art, architecture and music disappear, the boundaries of human identity disappear as well.

Why does manipulation flourish best in democracy? Is there such a culture which takes manipulation as the dominating type of social communication? It is the development of the democratic system that created the necessity of selling public persons in a market-based way. The politicians not only manipulate the people but allow to be manipulated themselves as well. In a way they are themselves commercial products. They are not aware of the fact, though, that even being most slick and skilful in public space does not guarantee permanent power. Passing political information is, more and more often similar to presenting a commercial product where the real information about the product is replaced by fiction.” Personality as a source of power […] once meant primarily intellectual, moral

attributes later also oratorical ones, finally it came down to photogenic and skills of unfettered behaviour in front of cameras and microphones.”\textsuperscript{17} The latter is particularly noticeable in various feature programmes in which actors are cast instead of politicians. Actually, the participants (the actors) are like empty vessels which can be filled with any content, The content of news services does not bring anything new, one watches them and the moment the programme ends one forgets what they were about. So we must remember that “technology can be a tool of liberation but of enslavement as well […], for very easily we become “tools of our tools”\textsuperscript{18}. When the citizens are deprived of their freedom of choice, then we have a situation where those who govern overpower those governed. This process occurs imperceptibly and painlessly, so the citizens are undisturbed and retain the status quo.

The Poles, similarly to the peoples of other Western European countries want to be governed competently, efficiently, skillfully and at the same time invisibly. The electorate, nowadays, expects efficient governing and a guarantee of satiated consumption. That is what Tocqueville warned against when he described the gentle despotism of a democratic state in which „there is powerful and tutelary authority which wants to meet human needs and keep watch over the fate of citizens. This authority is absolutely meticulous, pedantic, foreseeing and gentle […] it likes when citizens are doing well, on condition, though, that they think exclusively about their own well-being and the authority then willingly contributes to their happiness but wants to control and evaluate everything themselves”\textsuperscript{19}.

Growing dominance of mass media provokes to reflect not only on the condition of politics in the public space but of culture as well. Aesthetics, morality, decency, kindliness have become –using the language of economics – scarce goods. Is there a need for such values in the public life? In the ancient times Herostrates set fire to the temple in Ephesus to become famous. Nowadays nobody sets fire to temples but gaining fame and popularity is done in a similar way. The tools to achieve this


\textsuperscript{18} M. Król, Policy for fools, „Tygodnik Powszechny” 2002, No. 33. p.3.

are extravagance and scandal. Here is the dilemma of a contemporary politician: to be remembered thanks to impressive speeches or to present substantial content and be forgotten? Emotions, fun, entertainment but also aggression, omnipresent paradox and jokes accompanying the political life at first sight make an impression of the progressing infantilization of public life. It can be noticed that media discussions are analogous to a spectacle where everything happens according to a readymade scenario. What is more, the spectacular and stunning form of communication has become the basis of the functioning of politics.

What has become a universal phenomenon is making news services similar to TV serials. Typical feature and information programmes are replaced by fictional stories about mundane misfortunes of individual persons. News services become partly light entertainment or feature programmes. For example, we are daily informed about the fate of a lonely mother who wants to find accommodation for her children, or about the condition of a boy who ate a poisonous mushroom. All news of that sort has three stages of medial life. The first is in the information about the tragic event, relations with the family and friends confirming the uniqueness not even of the situation but of the hero of the story. The second stage concentrates on fighting the adversity or illness, the spectator becomes a participant of the struggle. At this stage the role of the medium that appeals for help is emphasized. The third, last stage is the happy end in a TV serial style. The reporters prove that there are good people in this world. The camera focuses on the tears of the heroes, which are accompanied by the description of the profile of the good, usually modest people who helped to change the life of our hero. The main hero, on the other hand says things that could be a motto for ordinary viewers, then he presents his plans for the nearest future. In the TV studio the news reporter happily emphasises his own and the station’s role in changing the life of one the million of Poles.

Very often the individual dramas show a really extraordinary sacrifice, which can serve as an example to follow, like the death of a policeman who tried to intervene in an act of hooliganism. Unfortunately, news about something that is an act of heroism and bravery on the one hand and an act of nihilism and social stagnation on the other is given next to a story
of a dog that swam across the river and was drifting the Gdańsk Bay. Presenting these two stories of drama and comedy next to each other is absurd. Media, as the mirror of public life reflect it, very often, though it is a distorting mirror showing a caricature. Thus, unimportant, minor things gain huge and symbolic value, whereas important things are marginalized, discredited and ignored.

The culture of emotions, picture and spectacle, which suppresses reflection and rationality of speech makes the viewer loose restraint and causes that he gets bored very quickly and his appetite grows for something new. The nature of contemporary political discourse is a really complicated one; there are different ways of discrediting the opponent: words, context of the situation, gestures, the appearance of the hero and his surroundings. What is the role of a public statement? Is it only a way to become known?

Media and politicians do not explain anything, they rather blind than lighten the problem. What is a politician, who is craving for fame or is dependent on popularity to do? Is he to become a victim and a slave of his own fame? The more a politician is visible and influential, the more he is drawn into the mechanism of debates, arguments, interviews and impressive statements, where it is form that is most important.

We have a new quality of utterances, usually full of anger, criticism and aversion not to the opposing views or ideas but to the person, the opponent. This leads to the deformation of the culture of the discussion, where there is lack of respect for the adversary. If media are said to be the fourth power, then it has to be remembered that power means not only manipulation, control and hierarchy but also responsibility and mission.

Obviously, the common criticism of media is a simplification and the accusations of actually creating the political life slowly become a cliché. While criticizing media, it should be remembered that media are the reflection of human weaknesses. The magic of television is that it meets our daily, trivial needs among which are entertainment that is impossible to get rid of. Mediatisation of politics is more and more noticeable. Reports from serious, tragic events are given next to those from trivial, frivolous ones or are presented in a light entertainment style. This way, what is worth

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20 M. Król, Policy for fools, „Tygodnik Powszechny” 2002, No. 33. p.3.
emphasising, light, unimportant topics grow into symbolic, huge problems whereas important information is marginalised, ignored or simply skipped.

There is something hypnotizing in this endless consumption of media products. Is politics in the centre of entertainment, then? The growing appetite for a show in politics has become a politician’s obsession. Scandal and originality, which are the basis of the entertainment industry, have become essential elements of the functioning of politics.

4. MEDIATISATION AND HISTORY

So far the notion of politics followed the logic that every fragment of human life is under the direct or indirect influence of authorities, which effects a person’s privacy, behaviour and relations with other people. This influence is so common and prevalent that it is unnoticeable and even if somebody tries to escape politics, he will fail, anyway. Politics is a part of human existence; it is our reflection with our virtues and vices; a reflection which we don’t always like but which tells a lot about ourselves. It tells about our respect for others, our emotions, our perception of reality and also our attitude to the state shown, for example, in the election turnout. This reflection, unfortunately, shows that we lack the ability of communication and cooperation. Very often this mirror reflects our national vices and deficiencies, which raises a laugh or causes astonishment and embarrassment.

The problem that the scholars and publicists are facing is: how to talk about our history and its heroes. The dramas in our history on both sides of the political barricade are judged by the contemporaries ambiguously and subjectively. From contemporary point of view it seems very easy to judge the events and their participants that happened twenty years earlier. Of course, it is not forbidden as far as the researcher’s attitude and feeling of personal freedom are concerned. It seems valuable, though, to take into account the perspective of the participants of the events, which

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will help to get to the truth. It has to be borne in mind that, the results of activities taken cannot always be foreseen like for example in 1989. Today’s accusations of too lenient a treatment of the representatives of the former system seem to be a naive interpretation of the chain of events.

When we assess past events, we often perceive history from the present day perspective. This is the obvious temptation to confront our present knowledge with the past reality. Very often while analysing particular historical events we skip the individual perspective of the participants of those events. The great help here are the numerous written memoirs which are the testimony and the literary proof of the complexity of historical processes. Without taking the latter into account the portrait of the past times will not be true and complete.

History cannot be a weapon in the political struggle. Here comes the responsibility of media that should attempt to understand the intricacies of the particular reality, some historical turbulences and the uniqueness of the situation. Nowadays there are many mutual accusations but there are few attempts to understand the adversary. That only proves the superficiality of the discussion and as Ludwig Wiittgenstein says “the limits of my language are the limits of my world”\textsuperscript{22}. Thus, we have a situation in which politics is brought into history which, on the other hand, is used as a tool in a political struggle; so political figures are often being demonized and accused by people looking for historical justice.

What is characteristic in the Polish political life is that dialogue is interpreted as a sign of weakness, rather than of political maturity. Political commercials, slogans, election programmes but also promises and pledges prove that politicians themselves treat their audience like children and with contempt. So, if such things take place can we talk about dialogue? Dialogue is a virtue of democracy but very few people remember and care about it. Dialogue is a key notion for the functioning of democracy and in the process of shaping the civil society. During the Polish transformation the notion was often underestimated or ignored. But conflict and disagreement became the real values. Both political parties try to consolidate the

state of media democracy where an appearance of dialogue is maintained. Thus, quarrels and disagreements are the essence of contemporary political life; the more spectacular the more interesting for the media. The democratic system reveals a certain paradox: the more freedom the less dialogue and agreement and more disagreement.

The very existence of dialogue is underestimated by many political groups; but it turns out that this form of cooperation based on partnership appeared at a very unexpected and symbolic moment in Polish history. It was The Round Table, which was the most significant form of public dialogue; it was so shocking for some political circles that they called it a “national treason”. Does The Round Table, which was a form of peaceful dialogue, deserve criticism, then? Is any form of dialogue, even with the political opponent a kind of treason? 20 years after transformation neither the ruling class nor the intelligentsia have answered those questions.

The conflict between the ruling power and the opposition has survived since the times of PRL (Polish People’s Republic). This results from the mistrust of the governing party since before 1989 and of the high cost of the social and economic transformation. Hasty and often naive principles of democracy became sort of a trap for the then ruling elite and the society as well. It turned out that democracy does not guarantee dialogue; dialogue must be built and created by the citizens together with the political class. Thus, a thesis can be advanced that the public debate hasn’t had a chance to develop during the last 20 years, because it was based on emotions and stereotypes, which pushed the participants to extreme ideological positions. Dialogue, discussion, public debate and pluralism are indispensable part of democracy. These notions are used and exploited in the public space all the time. In today’s world dominated by the omnipresent and omniscient media it is very easy to lose the meaning of the words.

The public space deformed by constant election campaigns was deprived of the cooperation between different political groups long ago. It is not the content that matters but the style which can get through to a wider group of the electorate. Thus, every form and means of communications is used to achieve the goal. Moreover, in a democratic system votes are not gained thanks to rational argumentation or content but by form, according to the principle that: “the crowd thinks solely through pictures and is very
sensitive to a scenic illustration of a fact or thing.”23 Thus, the uttered communiqués are more like election slogans than arguments and opinions that could bring the opponents closer together.

Why, then isn’t dialogue popular and interesting for contemporary democracy? Maybe it is because in its nature it is not so stunning. It does not attract attention of a person brought up in a consumerist society. It is the sensational scandals that are best received and waited for. The best illustration of that phenomenon is the 20th anniversary of the fall of communism; wide circles of Polish intelligentsia toot a very emotional stand on it and they were really astonished by the fact that an event that initiated the process of decommunization was driven from the international memory. We have to admit, though, that for the generation brought up on sensation and the pop culture of MTV the moment of knocking down the Berlin wall was much more interesting and inspiring than the boring in form and content deliberations of The Round Table. That is why we enter an epoch where what matters is the power of broadcast and not that of arguments. Where there are emotions, there is no reason that is why there are so many cases of adoration for totalitarian leaders and attempts to maintain the state of mad adoration for the authorities.

Reflection, rationality and distance have something of strangeness and they irritate the recipients of such attitude. Hence, the philosophers are so frequently sent to the scaffold, both literary and metaphorically. Philosophy has never been a friend of power. Fascism in Germany burnt books. Communism in Russia brought censorship. What was left in those countries was: emotions and blind obedience. A philosopher delves deeper and deeper into the matter, he is inquisitive and reflexive. That is why philosophy is always the first victim of totalitarian systems; despots need justification, so they create pathological doctrines that only echo philosophy. Paradoxically, the more valuable the views of the philosopher, the more criticised and hated he is. There are more questions than answers but that is the beauty of science, that each answer breeds more questions.

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Where there is no synchronization between reason and emotion we easily get manipulated, become fanatics and are an easy prey for all sorts of sects, not only in the religious sense. Media are here to blame, instead of explaining, informing they antagonise and confront using emotions not arguments. The electorate is always motivated against something and to support a certain idea. Consequently, the ballot box becomes a box of complaints, grievances and protests. People are stimulated into action always against something in manifestations, strikes but not in discussions: they don’t look for solutions, they demand a readymade product.

Moreover, there is the constant care to keep the social attention on political activities. What we are dealing with today is a constant, permanent and never ending election campaign; this caused not only by numerous elections coming year by year. What has to be noted is also the trivialization and fetishization of symbols, not only religious but national ones as well. Why then is patriotism aroused in the Polish people during sports events and is not present in our daily activities? Why are most of us practicing Catholics but not believers? Maybe it is because very often our actions are driven by the adoration for appearances and the immediate need.

Writing about politics it has to be noted that to a great extend decisions are made on the basis of negation and opportunism, rather than on ideological arguments. Such an attitude in politics can be called “negation identity”. The situation is that PIS (Law and Justice) is the main rival of PO (Civic Platform) and vice versa PO is the main rival of PIS. Both parties define their attitude and views on the basis of negation of the demands of the other. The attention is focused on the rivalry between the two parties. How is one to retain one’s own independent judgement not to be recognised as a supporter of one of the other political party? Attempting to answer this question are equal to attempts to gain an autonomy that will help to break the false division to: “them” and “us”.

The lack of dialogue is a recurring issue, which only proves the lack of the skills of conversation. Discourse should be a standard not a virtue. The numerous socio-political manifestations should inspire the reflection on the lack of the social dialogue. Unfortunately, numerous scandalous scenes prove that in spite of 20 years of experience of democracy the Polish society still lack the ability to talk. The latter was best illustrated
by the manifestations and protests that took place after April 10th 2010 at Krakowskie Przedmieście in Warsaw. The events emphasised the presence of many faults of the public life in Poland. What is characteristic is the fact that neither of the conflicting sides wanted to listen; screams and emotions were more important. There were negotiations, promises, requests, prayers but neither of these is dialogue, which is based on equal rights and mutual respect. There was more of a seeming discussion and acting than the art of politics; public activity it is also the art of communication, discussion, expressing one’s views and listening.

When we ponder the problems that occur at the meeting of politics and religion, we notice that the separation of the Church and the state and the public problems is impossible. The more so, that both institutions in many fields are and should be partners who should hold a dialogue. There is a wide sphere of common activities for both the Church and the state, to mention for example, social welfare or widely understood sensitivity to human injustice. What is more, Christian ethics is the foundation of law and universally accepted moral norms. Paradoxically, many supporters of the Left, who advocate the separation of the Church from the state, either forget or are not aware that most of the leftist socio-economical programme derives from Christianity. So, we can say that these two spheres – the imperial and the divine – complement each other. Certainly, power and religion should be separated but setting the demarcation line is really difficult. In a way, the fight against the Church and its symbols is a losing battle. Putting aside the heated arguments between the opposing parties, it has to be noted that in the heat of the political conflict both sides forgot that they are only partly right. We have to bear in mind that the withering scorn for the opponent is a sign of fear and that prejudice against others is a sign of ignorance.

To sum up: reflection, which is the basis of a dialogue, is a completely different thing. The dynamic and continuously changing political life doesn’t allow rational governing and having a dialogue with another person. Today, in the media democracy there is no room the exchange of thoughts and ideas, there is only a place for shocking. In today’s world human weaknesses and vices are glorified, especially by media. In the name of tolerance fetishization of human privacy is accepted and fully approved
by the masses. Contemporary reality is based on hedonism; it easily and quickly absorbs the problems of everyday life.

Over the 20 years of Polish transformation there were too few conversations about the Polish history and too many disputes. Very often the opinions and assessment avoided wide and objective look at the processes and decision making. Individual dramas, which are the inherent part of every human being existence, are subjected to the terror of a spectacle which has nothing to do with an honest and objective reflection.

SUMMARY

The role of the public sphere has increasingly come to the fore in studies concerning the state of democracy in Europe. Similarly the role of culture in formations and transformations not only of personal but of political identities as well has attracted attention. It is the purpose of this article to bring these areas together in a comprehensive approach to media, culture and democracy with a view of the public sphere as a crucial mediating field.

Article focuses on the role of media in sustaining and developing democracy, a democratic dialogue and in fulfilling the role of media as the critical watchdog of the political system and other powerful players on the European scene. The concept of knowledge democracy is meant to enable a new focus on the relationships between knowledge production and dissemination, the functioning of the media and our democratic institutions. The emerging concept of knowledge democracy moreover obliges us to realise that the institutional frameworks of today's societies may appear to be deficient as far as the above mentioned undercurrents, trends and other developments demand change.

Democracy is without a doubt the most successful governance concept for societies during the last two centuries. It is a strong brand, even used by rulers who do not meet any democratic criterion. Representation gradually became the predominant mechanism by which the population at large, through elections, provides a body with a general authorisation to take decisions in all public domains for a certain period of time.

Fragmentation of values has lead to individualisation, to uniqueness but thereby also to the impossibility of being represented in a general manner by a single actor such as a member of parliament. More fundamentally media-politics destroy the original meaning of representation.

**Keywords:** media coverage, democracy, manipulation, political system, political representation