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Polish Journalists in Comparative Studies of Media Accountability Systems in Europe

ABSTRACT

The article presents selected results of empirical research conducted in Poland between 23 May and 31 December 2011, based on an online questionnaire, as part of the international research project "Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe" (MediaAcT). It aims at examining professional problems of journalists, the level of journalistic responsibility as well as relations between media organisations and the public. The results are compared with data gathered in MediaAcT research in other European countries.

One of the results of media system transformation in Central and East Europe was the introduction of mechanisms supporting autonomy and accountability of media organisations. The emergence of professional codes of conduct, press councils, as well as journalistic associations was a clear sign of the transformations taking place within the journalistic culture and the professionalisation of journalism. Transformation of media systems and professional norms of journalism in Poland has been the subject of many analyses and discussions[1]. Most

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[1] See, e.g.: W. Pisarek, "Kwalifikacje dziennikarzy w opinii redaktorów naczelnych" [Qualifications of journalists as viewed by editors-in-chief], *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* 1994, No. 1/2, pp. 153–163; J. Olędzki, "Polish Journalists: Professionals or Not?", in: *The Global Journalist. News People Around the World*, ed. by D.H. Weaver, N.J. Cresskill, 1998, pp. 257–276; Z. Bajka, "Dziennikarze lat dziewięćdziesiątych" [Journalists of the 90s], *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* 2000, No. 3/4, pp. 42–63; T. Kononiuk, "Zawodowstwo w dziennikarstwie – wyzwania XXI wieku" [Professionalism in journalism: challenges for 21st century], *Studia Medioznawcze* [Media Studies] 2001, No. 3, pp. 15–22; P. Kwiatkowski, *Przedsiębiorstwo Apokalipsa. O etyce dziennikarskiej* [Apocalypse Co.: On journalistic ethics], Poznań 2003; *Między odpowiedzialnością a sensacją. Dziennikarstwo i edukacja na przełomie wieków* [Between accountability and sensation: Journalism and education at the turn of the centuries], ed. by K. Wolny-Zmorzyński, M. Wrońska, W. Furman, Rzeszów 2006; S. Mocek, *Dziennikarze po komunizmie. Elita mediów w świetle badań społecznych* [Journalists after Communism: Media elite in the light of social studies], Warszawa 2006; M. Chyliński, "Etyka i normy zawodowe dziennikarzy" [Ethics and professional norms of journalists], *Wiedza i Umiejętności* Vol. 9 (2006), pp. 175–191; M. Barańska, "Dylematy współczesnego dziennikarza/dziennikarstwa: wybrane zagadnienia" [Dilemmas of modern journalist/journalism: Selected issues], *Przegląd Politologiczny* 2011; A. Stępińska, S. Ossowski, "Dziennikarze w Polsce: wartości, priorytety i standardy zawodowe" [Journalists in Poland: Values, priorities and professional standards], *Studia Medioznawcze* 2011, No. 1, pp. 17–28; L. Szot, "Wpływ profesjonalizmu dziennikarzy na transformację polskiej

of the studies published so far addressed the issues of formulating the notion of journalism, professional codes of conducts, as well as processes of self- and co-regulation. However, so far they have overlooked the analysis of media accountability in the era of citizen journalism and social media.

The analysis of media accountability systems in Europe and the comparison of the influence of new media and technologies on media accountability have been defined as the main objectives of the international research project entitled "Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe (MediaAcT)"[2]. This chapter aims at presenting selected results of empirical research conducted as a part of the MediaAcT project, with a particular emphasis on the role of external factors which influence the development of journalist professionalism, as well as the relations between media and the public in the times of the fast-changing online media environment. In line with this, the chapter will map the most characteristic features of the media accountability system in Poland, and it will further point out similarities and differences between Poland and selected European countries.

The aim of this article is to answer to the following research questions: How do Polish journalists perceive their professional roles? To whom do they feel responsible? How do media professionals react to the criticism from the audience? How do they assess the level of interest of the audience in issues related to freedom of speech and journalistic accountability? Has the development of new media and technologies increased the level of accountability and media professionals' readiness to engage in the dialogue with media users about the quality

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prasy po 1989 roku" [Influence of journalist professionalism in the transformation of Polish press after 1989], *Studia Medioznawcze* 2010, No. 2, pp. 27–38; B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Polski system medialny na rozdrożu. Media w polityce, polityka w mediach* [Polish media system at the crossroads: Media in politics, politics in media], Wrocław 2011; *Odpowiedzialność w mediach – od przypadku do przypadku* [Accountability in media – from case to case], ed. by A. Baczyński, M. Drożdż, Tarnów 2012.

[2] The information in this document is the outcome of the EU project "Media Accountability and Transparency (MediaAcT)". The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement n° 244147. The study refers to findings from the 'MediaAcT' online survey distributed among media professionals in Austria, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Switzerland and United Kingdom in 2011. The findings of the research have been supplemented by findings from the interviews with media experts and practitioners by the author of this article in September 2012, in the course of research project entitled "Media accountability and transparency in Central and Southern Europe – a comparative analysis of the role of new technologies and media" (Pol. *Mechanizmy promujące odpowiedzialne i przejrzyste media w Europie Środkowej i Południowej – analiza porównawcza roli nowych technologii i mediów*) (Institute of Journalism, University of Warsaw). For more on the MediaAcT programme, see: P. Barczyszyn, M. Głowacki, A. Michel, "Projekt 7. Ramowego Programu Komisji Europejskiej (2010–2013) we Wrocławiu. Odpowiedzialność i przejrzystość mediów w Europie: MediaAcT" [Project of 7. Framework Programme of the European Community (2010–2013) in Wrocław: Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe: MediaAcT], *Studia Medioznawcze* 2001, No. 2, pp. 129–134.

and consequences of publications? How do Polish journalists perceive the concept of transparency in contemporary media organisations?

Media accountability system

Media accountability, defined at the end of the last century and developed in subsequent decades, is used here as a starting point for the analysis of journalistic ethics and professionalisation. Claude-Jean Bertrand defines media accountability in the context of all forms of non-governmental activities which contribute to the increase in the level of media accountability towards the recipients[3]. Denis McQuail further emphasises that accountability is the processes through which media organisations are held into account to the society for the quality and consequences of publications[4]. Thus the notion of a media accountability includes values and moral and ethical questions raised in the debates on the quality and consequences of publications. On the other hand, it stresses the role of the institutions and mechanisms which supervise the adherence to the rules and enforce the laws and norms which have been infringed[5].

The accountability processes are analysed taking into account the development of self-regulation mechanisms (the professional level) as well as the role of the external factors having an impact on the journalist professionalism and culture. Political environment, market frame, and the relations between media organisations and the public (formerly passive audiences, now media users) are often among the main factors shaping the system of media accountability[6] (Figure 1).

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[3] C.-J. Bertrand, *Media Ethics & Accountability Systems*, London 2000.
[4] D. McQuail, *Media Accountability and Freedom of Publication*, New York 2003.
[5] *Idem*, *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*, 6th ed., London 2010.
[6] J. Bardoel, L. d'Haenens, "Media Responsibility and Accountability: New Conceptualizations and Practices", *Communications* Vol. 29 (2004), No. 1, pp. 5–25.
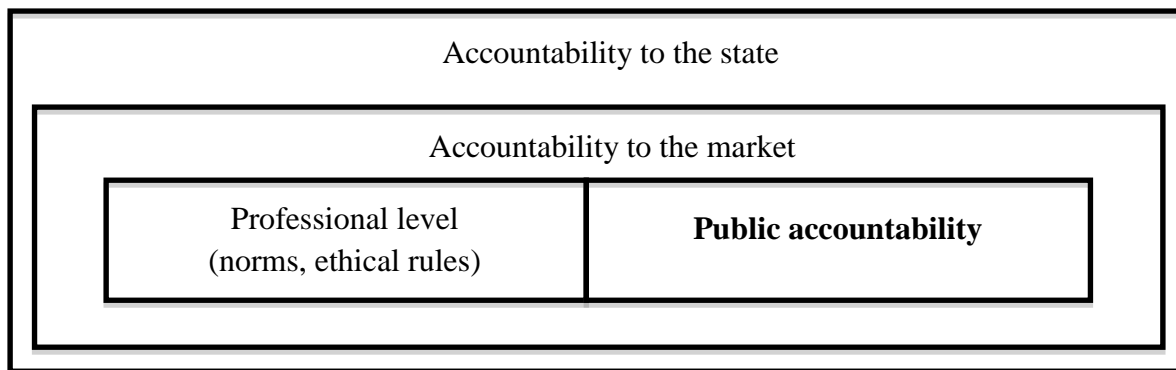
<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Accountability to the state</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Accountability to the market</td></tr>
<tr><td>Professional level
(norms, ethical rules)</td><td>**Public accountability**</td></tr>
</table>

Figure 1. Levels of media accountability

European countries differ in the level of development of the mechanisms promoting accountable and independent media. The differences between the countries concern the types and efficiency of adopted practices, as well as diversity, which makes it difficult to present universal model and conclusions. Overall, media accountability systems in Europe are formed by traditional mechanisms, based on the media law, ethical standards, and documents prepared by journalist associations (e.g. in Austria and France). In some countries importance of the activity of the so-called news/media ombudsmen (e.g. in Estonia, the Netherlands, and Slovenia) and press councils, which constitute an institutionalised form of self-regulation (e.g. in Estonia, Finland, and the Netherlands) might also be observed. The principles of journalist work and the mechanisms promoting journalistic ethics in Poland can be found, among others, in the *Charter of Media Ethics* (Pol. *Karta Etyczna Mediów*) and the *Journalistic Professional Code* (Pol. *Dziennikarski Kodeks Obyczajowy*). The media accountability system in Poland is also shaped by the activity of the *Council of Media Ethics* (Pol. *Rada Etyki Mediów*) and journalistic associations[7].

Due to the development of new media and technologies, the notion of accountability is nowadays being discussed in connection to additional mechanisms and practices, characterised by a relatively low level of institutionalisation. These include, for instance, journalistic blogs, profiles of journalists on the websites of media organisations, creation of

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[7] For more, see P. Urbaniak, "System odpowiedzialności mediów jako przejaw samoregulacyjnych mechanizmów kształtowania rynku medialnego" [Media accountability system as a symptom of self-regulating mechanisms of media market shaping], *Studia Medioznawcze* 2011, No. 2, pp. 58–69; E. Murawska-Najmiec, "Informacja na temat istniejącego w Polsce systemu ochrony etyki dziennikarskiej" [Information on the journalist ethics protection system in Poland], *Analiza Biura KRRiT* [Analysis of the National Broadcasting Council Office] 2006, No. 7, www.krrit.gov.pl/Data/Files/_public/pliki/publikacje/analiza2006_07.pdf [accessed: 7.12.2012].

content by media users, comments in news, as well as expressing opinions and complaints in social media[8]. In line with this Susanne Fengler, Tobias Eberwein, and Tanja Leppik-Bork define accountability as all informal activity undertaken by both the employees and the users of the media, with the purpose of monitoring, criticising, and commenting on journalistic activity, as well as stimulating the debate about the problems of journalism[9]. The adoption of this perspective is of high importance when analysing processes at different levels and stages of publication (media accountability before publication, media accountability during the production of news, and media accountability after the publication)[10]. Secondly, it creates a helpful tool to investigate accountability systems in terms of transparency of media organisations (such as the information on media ownership, editorial policy, ethical standards online, and links to sources of information), which might increase the trust level of the audience in media. Finally, the broad concept of media accountability can facilitate the analysis media organisations' readiness to include the audiences in the process of content production and to engage in a dialogue with the public on the quality and consequences of publication.

Methodology

Several different research methods have been used when conducting research on "Media Accountability and Transparency in Europe (MediaAcT)". This included, at the first stage, the analysis of the sources of available literature and media self-regulation. In the following phase research teams carried out about hundred of in-depth interviews with media practitioners, experts, bloggers, social media users, as well as representatives of government and international institutions responsible for directing the development of media policy in selected countries. These interviews, conduced in twelve European countries and in the United States[11], were designed to map and assess the efficiency of recognised media innovations (understood here in terms of mechanisms and practices which can strengthen media

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[8] *Mapping Media Accountability – in Europe and Beyond*, eds. T. Eberwein and oth., Köln 2011.

[9] S. Fengler, T. Eberwein, T. Leppik-Bork, "Mapping Media Accountability – in Europe and Beyond", in: *Mapping Media…*, www.halem-verlag.de/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/9783869620381_lese.pdf [accessed: 30.01.2013].

[10] H. Evers, H. Groenhart, *The Role of Technology in Accountability Process. Facilitating and Changing Context*. Paper presented during theoretical workshop of project „MediaAcT", Tartu, Estonia, June 12, 2010.

[11] The analysis of media accountability system in the United States was one of the research subjects in the "Work Package 4". The purpose of in-depth interviews with experts and media practitioners carried out in the USA was to stress the differences in the understanding of accountability and media innovation. The gathered information helped to point out the tendencies which make the American media system different from European systems of media accountability.

accountability and transparency in the era of new technologies), journalistic professionalisation, and internet users' culture. The findings were analysed in national country reports were further used as a source for the first comparative studies[12]. The main goal of MediaAcT project was to conduct empirical research in all participating countries. The studies were carried out on the basis of an online questionnaire which—thanks to the gathered answered—enabled the analysis of the perception of media accountability by members of the profession[13].

At the first stage of empirical research each national team estimated the number of professionally active journalists in a respective country. With a reference to the list of existing media organisations and other tools, including a series of telephone interviews, the Polish team estimated the number of journalists in the country (11,989)[14]. The population of members of the profession in Poland was defined according to the criteria adopted for the purpose of the project, which took into account the following factors:

– *functional* – journalism is an activity based on preparation and processing of information,

– *job market-related* – journalist is a person in a working relationship with a media organisation,

– *economic* – journalist is a person who derives at least 50% of his/her income from journalistic activity.

In spring 2011 a team of German researchers developed sampling strategy for the participants of the "MediaAcT" project. Based on the results of pilot studies carried out in Italy, Romania, Germany, and the United Kingdom, the size of the pilot sample for the whole

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[12] "Media Accountability Goes Online. A Transnational Study on Emerging Practices and Innovations", auth. H. Heikkilä and oth., *MediaAcT Working Paper* No. 14/2012, www.mediaact.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/WP4_ Outcomes/WP4_Report.pdf [accessed: 5.01.2013].

[13] The online questionnaire comprised 20 closed questions. The questions addressed the factors responsible for the development of journalistic professionalism and culture, the role of media managers in encouraging the debate over the quality and consequences of publications, the development of self-regulation and media policy, as well as issues associated with transparency of media organisations. Invitations to take part in the survey were sent to representatives of the profession, whose names and affiliations were recorded in a database created for the purpose of the research. All of this took into account different segments of the media market (press, radio, television, press agencies, online media).

[14] In 2012 a team carrying out research in the framework of the project "Journalism in Change. Professional Journalistic Cultures in Russia, Poland and Sweden" estimated the population of journalists in Poland at the level of 10,010. The discrepancies in data concerning the population result from the different methods of sample estimation, but they may also attest to the decrease in the number of the members of the profession in Poland. For more on this subject, see: B. Dobek-Ostrowska, P. Barczyszyn, A. Michel, "Zmiana w dziennikarstwie. Kultura zawodowa polskich dziennikarzy (badania ilościowe)" [Journalism in change. Professionalism and Journalistic Culture in Poland], *Studia Medioznawcze* 2013, No. 1, pp. 11–27.

study was defined at the level of 1798 (Table 1). According to Buttler and Fickel's formula, which above all takes into account the sum of basic population and standard deviation (0.05), the size of the sample for Poland was determined to be 100 respondents (Table 2)[15].

Study sample in Poland was further created taking into account the differences in the population related to the types of media (daily newspapers, magazines, public radio, private radio, public television, private television, online media, press agencies) and the role of journalist in a given media organisation. The largest group (37%) was defined with regard to representatives of national and local daily newspapers, while the proportion of journalists from magazines (only from the so-called magazines of opinion) was estimated at the level of 19%. Due to the lack of information concerning the functions of individual journalists, and the increasing level of multitasking in their work, the quantitative relation between management departments (publishers, editors-in-chief, assignment editors) and operational departments (journalists) was based on the formula of 30% vs. 70% adopted by research teams in several countries.

Table 1. Research sample: "Media AcT" empirical research

Country	Population of journalists	Research sample
Austria	6405	100
Estonia	1133	100
Finland	8349	100
France	37417	155
Germany	48381	200
Italy	2500	104
Jordan	1601	100
The Netherlands	15000	100
Poland	**11989**	**100**
Romania	35200	146
Spain	25000	104
Switzerland	10292	100
Tunisia	1004	100
United Kingdom	70000	289

[15] For more on this method for sampling, see: G. Buttler, N. Fickel, *Statistik mit Stichproben* [Statistics with samples], Hamburg 2002, p. 151.

Total	296770		1798

Table 2. Research sample of the "MediaAcT" empirical research in Poland

	Management level	**Operational level**	*Freelancers*	**Research sample**
Daily newspapers	12	24	1	37
Magazines	4	13	2	19
Public radio	4	8	0	12
Private radio	3	5	0	8
Public television	2	6	0	8
Private television	2	8	0	10
Online media	1	2	1	4
Press agencies	1	1	0	2
Total	29	67	4	100

The research sample selected for the purpose of empirical studies helped to distinguish three professional groups according to the age of Polish respondents. The biggest group was composed of employees from the age group of 31–50.

The results of empirical studies presented below, which were carried out in Poland between 23 May 2011 and 31 December 2011, take into account selected questions from the questionnaire, in particular with regard to professional problems of journalists, as well as the level of accountability between media organisations and the public (Figure 1). Due to significant differences in media development in the Arab countries we do not focus here on media accountability in Jordan and Tunisia.

Levels of accountability

According to 81% of respondents from Poland media accountability is a prerequisite for press freedom. The majority of representatives of the profession declared feeling accountable to their own conscience, journalistic standards, sources or information, and their audience. The level of accountability to editors-in-chiefs, colleagues in the newsrooms, as well as publishers was lower. A large number of journalists indicated not feeling accountable to religious authorities, advertisers, or God. The lowest support for accountability was observed in

relation to political ideas and government. Only one person surveyed in Poland indicated feeling accountable to political parties (Figure 2).
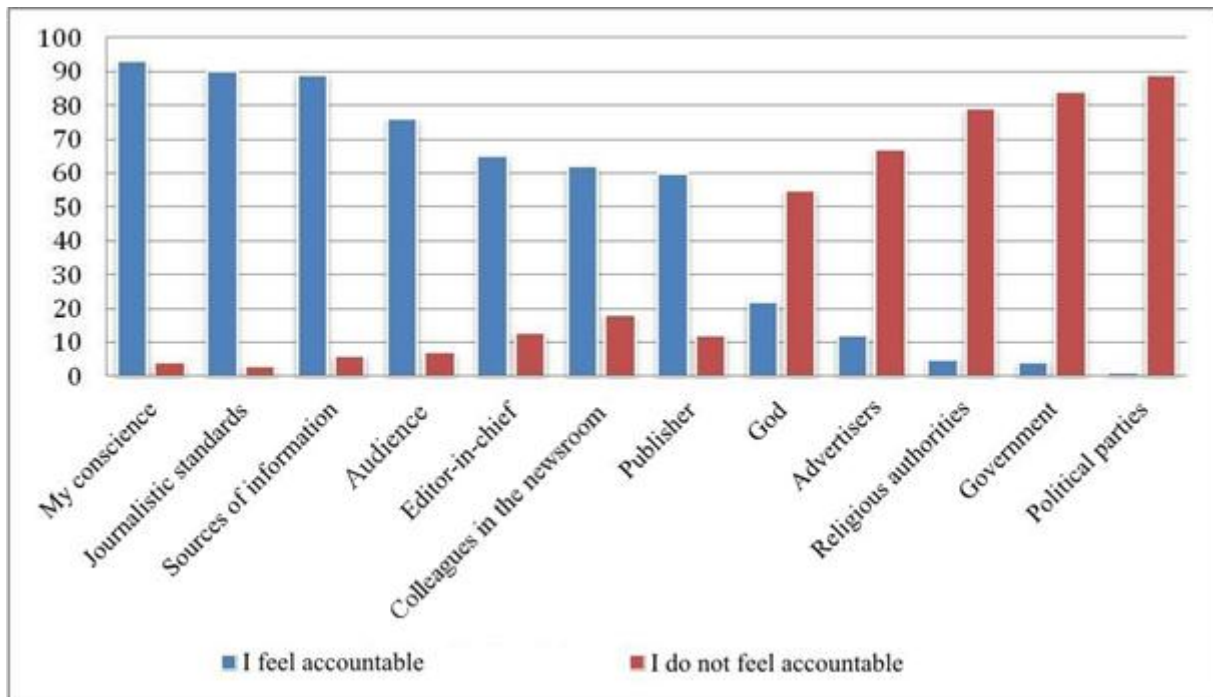

Figure 2. "To whom or what do you feel accountable?" (per cent of responses)

Source: Results from empirical studies, "MediaAcT" 2012.

A comparison of answers given by respondents from different age groups yielded interesting results. For instance, 81% of respondents from the age group of 30–51 years and 27% from 50+ group declared feeling accountable to the audience. The level of accountability to owners, publishers, or editors-in-chief was the lowest among the youngest representatives of the profession. None of respondents from the age group of 19–30 indicated feeling accountable to the government. Low level of accountability to advertisers was declared by the oldest representatives of the profession.

The tendencies discussed here showed many similarities between Poland and countries from various journalistic cultures. The level of accountability towards conscience was similar to the level of accountability in Estonia, Finland, Austria, and Germany. Similarly to this, data gathered with respect to accountability towards journalistic standards was similar to data from Austria, Estonia, and Germany. High level of accountability towards God, religious authorities as well as government and political parties was indicated in Romania. The level of accountability of Polish journalists to the audience was higher than the one observed in

Austria, the Netherlands, and Switzerland, but, at the same time, it was lower than the one observed in Estonia, Finland, and Romania.

Overall, Polish journalists defined their accountability mostly with respect to their own conscience, the audience and the employees of media organisations. In general, Polish journalists do not feel accountable to advertisers, religious authorities, and politics, which is of high importance when strengthening media independence and autonomy. Similar tendencies were observed in a large number of countries participating in the "MediaAcT" study.

Professional problems of journalists

In taking a closer look at the survey results Polish journalists emphasise economic pressure (71% of responses), inadequate salary (69%), and media hypes (57%) to be the biggest problem of journalists in the country. 54% of members of the profession pointed out that journalists are inadequately trained. Political pressure was not regarded to be a major problem for journalists in the country. Interestingly, 44 per cent of all respondents declared that journalists in the country do not adhere to professional standards (Figure 3).
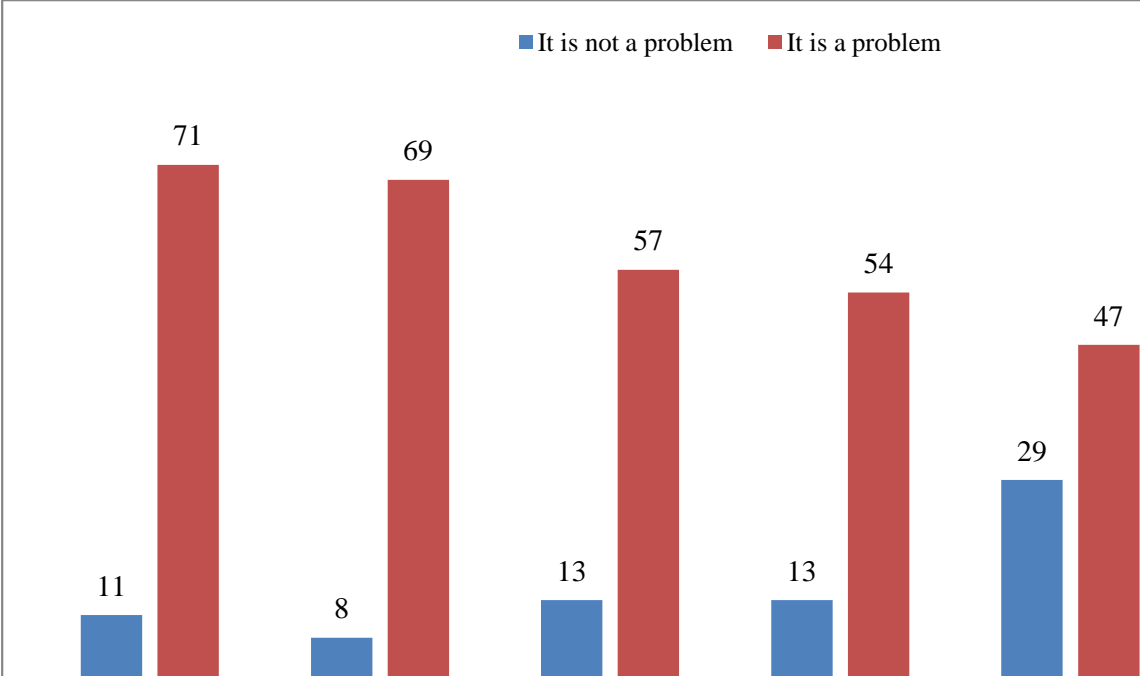

Figure 3. "What is a problem for the development of journalism in Poland?"
(per cent of responses)

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Economic pressure was regarded to be a problem according to 71% representatives from operational and 59% of respondents from managerial levels. Economic pressure was more often underlined by the youngest group of journalists (72% of respondents from the age group 19–30). In addition, more reporters (73 per cent of operational level representatives) than managers (55 per cent of managerial level representatives) declared that inadequate salary is a problem of journalism profession in Poland. In turn problems with journalistic education were more often observed by chief and leading editors (66 per cent of managerial level respondents) rather than by reporters (49 per cent of operational level respondents). Interestingly, more often the oldest generation of journalists (group of 50+ years old) regarded inadequate training as a problem of journalism in the country. Political pressure was considered to be a problem in the age group 31–50 (53% of respondents) and the oldest generation of journalists (45%). The youngest group of journalists was the most active when underlining problems with professional standards in journalism (50 per cent of 19-30 years old respondents).

The research results have shown that Polish media professionals do not differ significantly when taking into account professional problems of journalism; since more than 70% of media professionals in Austria, Germany, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, or Italy, also mapped economic pressure among the biggest problems of journalism. Over 70% of respondents pointing out insufficient salary placed Poland at one of the highest support rate for this statement (after Spain). Inadequate salary was regarded as a problem also in the United Kingdom, Romania, and Estonia. Only in two countries - the Netherlands and Finland – more journalists declared that insufficient salary does not create a problem for the development of professional journalism. However, in these two countries media hypes and sensational nature of the news were often pointed out as obstacles. In taking a closer look at issues related to news sensionalisation members of the profession in Poland did not much differ a lot from respondents from Austria or Italy. However, together with Romania and Italy, Poland was in the group of top three countries which regarded inadequate training and education as a problem for the development of the profession. Similarly to this, journalists from Poland was at the third place (behind Italy and Romania) when emphasising problems with following standards of journalism. Interestingly, Polish journalists were not in the group of countries where the majority of media professionals indicated negative impact of politics

on media. Their colleagues from Southern European countries, as well as Romania and Austria, more often indicated politics as a factor which can negatively influence the quality of journalism. On the other hand, 87% of Polish media professionals indicated that formal systems of media regulation are open to abuse for political purposes.

All the data presented here indicate the increasing role of economy and its impact on the quality of journalism in Poland. In particular, this has been observed among the youngest members of the profession, who have indicated difficult job market situation and the examples of violations of ethical standards. The problems related to generation of profit and the growing role of relations with advertisers, as well as relations between media and politics were noticed already at the stage of meetings and direct interviews with experts and media practitioners in Poland, but also in the Netherlands[16], Finland[17], and the United States[18]. Interestingly, political pressure was not seen that often as in the case of media professionals in Romania, Spain and Italy. In addition, one of the interviewed in Slovenia mentioned the direct use of media for political purposes and clear divisions in the journalistic community based on overt political sympathies[19]. In Bulgaria, additional stress was laid on the practice of creating so-called 'paid news' coverage, which are funded by government institutions and therefore often present the authorities in a 'good light'[20].

Relations with audience

In general, members of the profession in Poland have a positive view of how Polish journalists fulfil their tasks and duties. 42 respondents agreed and totally agreed that journalists give the audience what they want; 49% from operational level and 36% from managerial positions. The largest support for this statement was indicated in Estonia (59% of respondents), while the lowest support was observed in France (22%) and the Netherlands (30%).

According to 57% of Polish journalists, media managers encourage their employees to respond to complaints and criticism; 65% of Polish respondents indicated that media

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[16] H. Groenhart, "Between hope and fear: Distinctiveness of media accountability online in the Netherlands", *MediaAcT Working Paper* No. 7/2011, www.mediaact.eu/online.html [accessed: 5.01.2013].
[17] H. Heikkilä, "Leaving it up to professionals (and the market): Development of online media accountability instruments in Finland", *MediaAcT Working Paper* No. 2/2011, www.mediaact.eu/online.html [accessed: 5.01.2013].
[18] D. Domingo, "Entrenched in detachment: Professional values are the main constraint to accountability in the United States", *MediaAcT Working Paper* No. 11/2011, www.mediaact.eu/online.html [accessed: 5.01.2013].
[19] Interview with J. Verbič, RTV Slovenija (Ljubljana, 5.09.2012).
[20] M. Głowacki, "A Sleeping mechanism for the time being? Media accountability online in Bulgaria", *MediaAcT Working Paper* No. 1/2011, www.mediaact.eu/online.html [accessed: 5.01.2013].

organisations should react to comments raised by the audience. In addition, almost a half of respondents indicated that journalists are concerned about criticism from the public. The largest support for the question about the journalists' reaction to the audience criticism was observed in the group of the youngest members of the profession. The results of the survey ranked Poland next to the Netherlands and at the higher position than Austria, France, Germany, or Romania. Only in two countries, Finland and Italy, more respondents believed that journalists are not concerned about criticism from the audience (Figure 4).
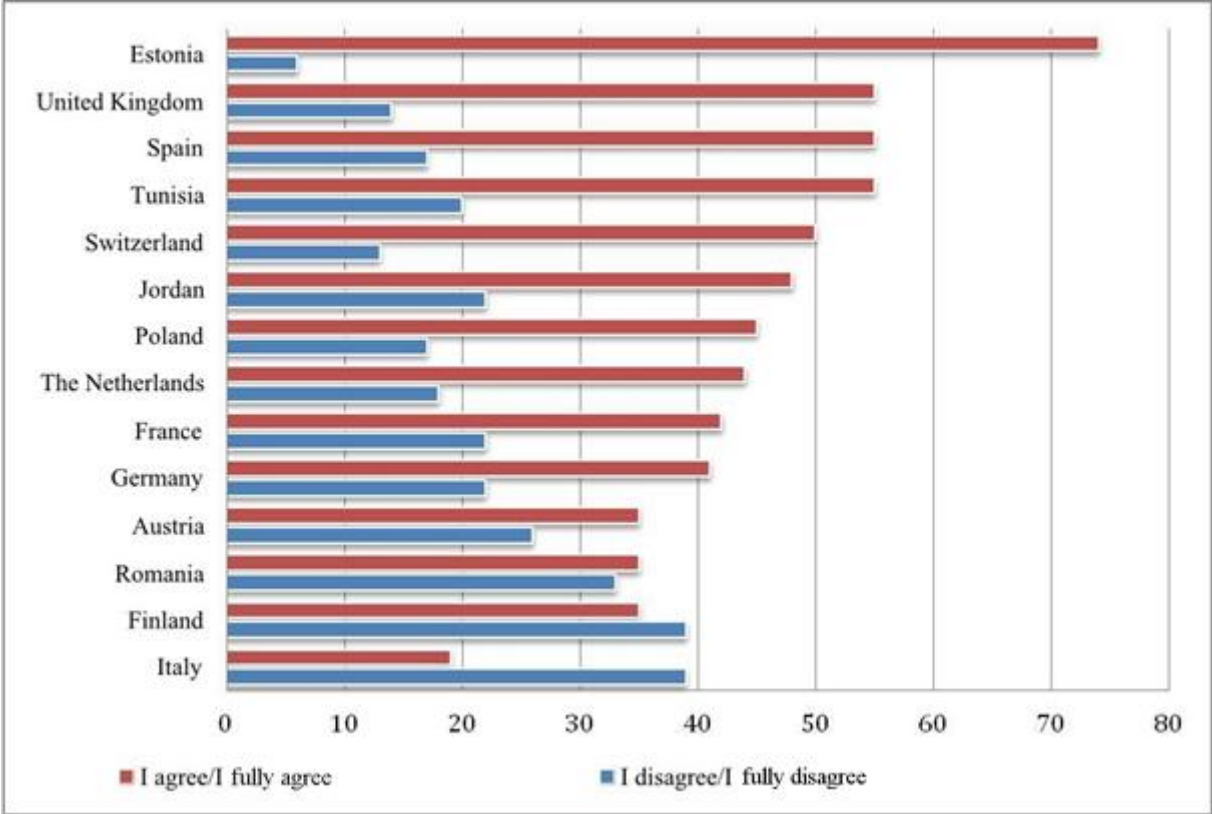

Figure 4. "Do journalists are concerned about criticism from the audience?"
(perc ent of responses)

Source: Results of empirical studies, "MediaAcT" 2012.

61% of Polish journalists indicated that members of the public are generally interested on issues related to media freedom and journalistic responsibility (only 10% of participants gave a positive assessment of the audience involvement - 6 respondents from the print media, 3 from public radio, and one from press agency). Overall, these results placed Poland at the last position when evaluating audience involvement in the problems related to freedom of

speech and media accountability. A relatively high proportion of negative answers was also observed in Spain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, and Switzerland (Figure 5).
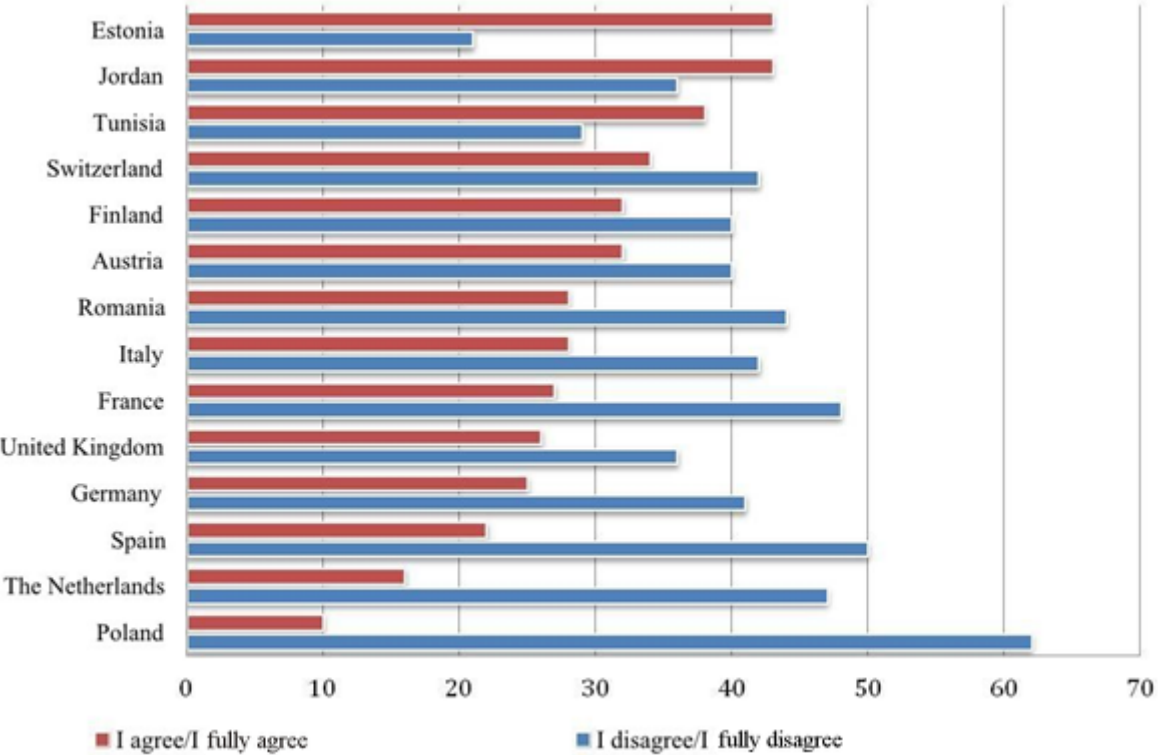

Figure 5. "Members of the public are generally interested on issues related to media freedom and journalistic responsibility" (per cent of responses)

Source: Results of empirical studies, "MediaAcT" 2012.

According to 38% of respondents from Poland, the Internet has increased people's readiness to call new media to account. Positive role of the Internet in improving media accountability was more often reported by young members of the profession than by the older representatives of the profession. Poland was the only country where more journalists did not indicate the positive role of Internet in fostering media accountability. The positive role of the internet was noticed to the greatest extent in the Netherlands, France, and Switzerland (Figure 6).
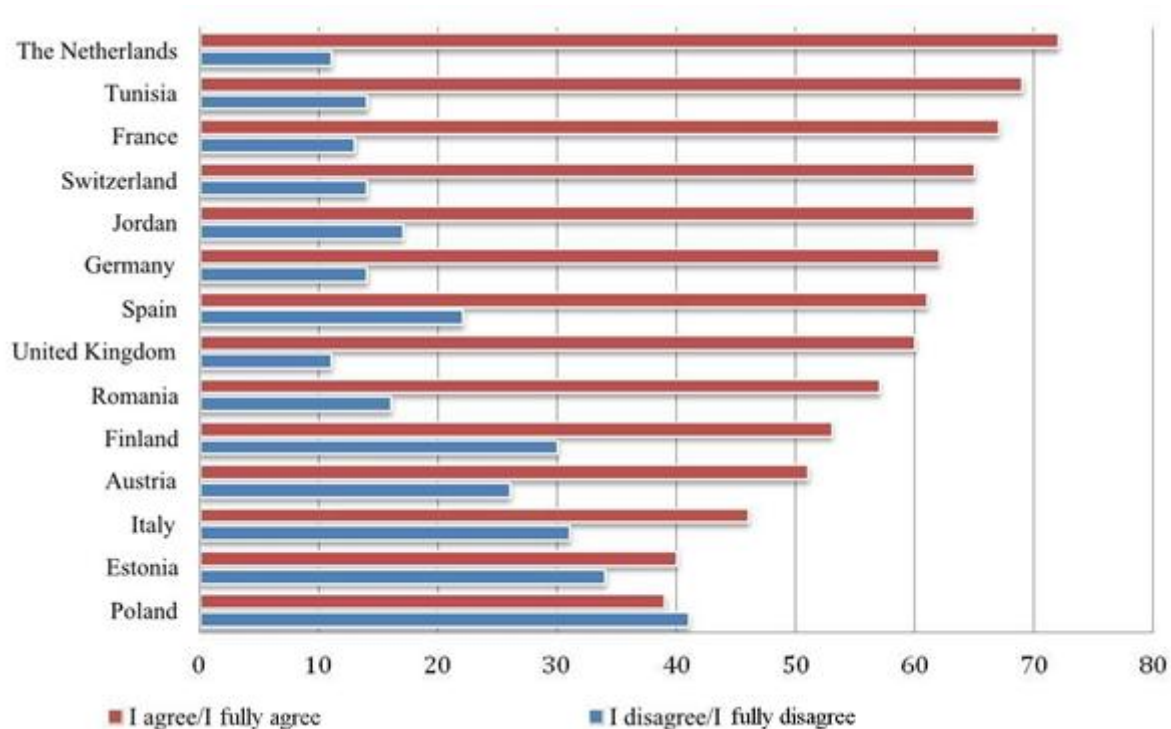
Figure 6. "Internet has increased people's readiness to call news media to account"
(percentages of answers)

Source: Results of empirical studies, "MediaAcT" 2012.

In most of the analysed countries, including Poland, journalists had only a very limited experience of being criticised by users of online media. With the exception of Finland, United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, where 20% of media professionals experienced criticism via social media, in the overwhelming majority of counties, the users of new technologies were not perceived as being engaged in the debate on the quality and consequences of publication.

The results of the empirical research on the relations between media and audience underline the lack of consistency in that matter. On one hand, Polish journalists claim to follow the users'; yet on the other hand, they still perceive the audience in terms of passive participants. The positive evaluation of journalists' activities towards media users, associated with a rather negative perception of the level of involvement of the audience, could be explained by a relatively low participation of society in the public debate. Additionally, during direct interviews media experts in Poland mentioned additional problems, including media education, availability of the Internet, as well as low participation of online media users

in the process of creating and commenting on news[21]. Problems in relations between media and public were also reported in Serbia, where typical users of Internet are young people from large cities, who tend to use new media as a source of entertainment[22]. Similar tendencies were also observed while analysing media accountability in Slovenia, where due to the establishment of of media ombudsman, the level of interaction with the audience on the quality and consequences of publications is higher. Miša Molk, who serves as the media ombudsperson in Slovenian public media (RTV Slovenija) enterprise, has noticed a range of positive effects of her work. She also emphasised, that dealing with users' complaints and delivering them to the journalists makes the media ombudsperson institution "one of the most lonely professions in the world"[23].

Transparency in the era of new media and technologies

Generally, journalists in Poland have positively evaluated the mechanisms and practices supporting media accountability and transparency. According to 59% of respondents, media organisations should publish the information on their editorial policy; 42% indicated that ethical codes should be published as well. More than 75% journalists stated that media should inform about their ownership structure and media-political connections. Additionally, according to more than 65% of respondents, media organisations should have an obligation to publish the information which allows to contact the editors, as well as the links to the original sources. 52% media professionals agreed that media organisations should become involved in initiatives fostering co-creation of content with users', thus increasing the transparency of production processes. 23% of respondents noticed the role of editorial blogs, which inform users about the most important decisions in the newsrooms.

The positive evaluation of practices promoting transparency of media organisations was confronted in the study with the level of trust. In the case of Poland, 35% of members of the profession agreed with the statement that "The more people know about the way journalists work, the less they trust them" (Figure 7).

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[21] M. Kuś, "Poland: Waiting for the citizens to demand online media accountability", *MediaAcT Working Paper* No. 8/2011, www.mediaact.eu/online.html [accessed: 5.01.2013].
[22] M. Głowacki, M. Kuś, "From one transformation to another: Towards and understanding of challenges for media accountability online in Serbia", *MediaAcT Working Paper* No. 9/2011, www.mediaact.eu/online.html [accessed: 5.01.2013].
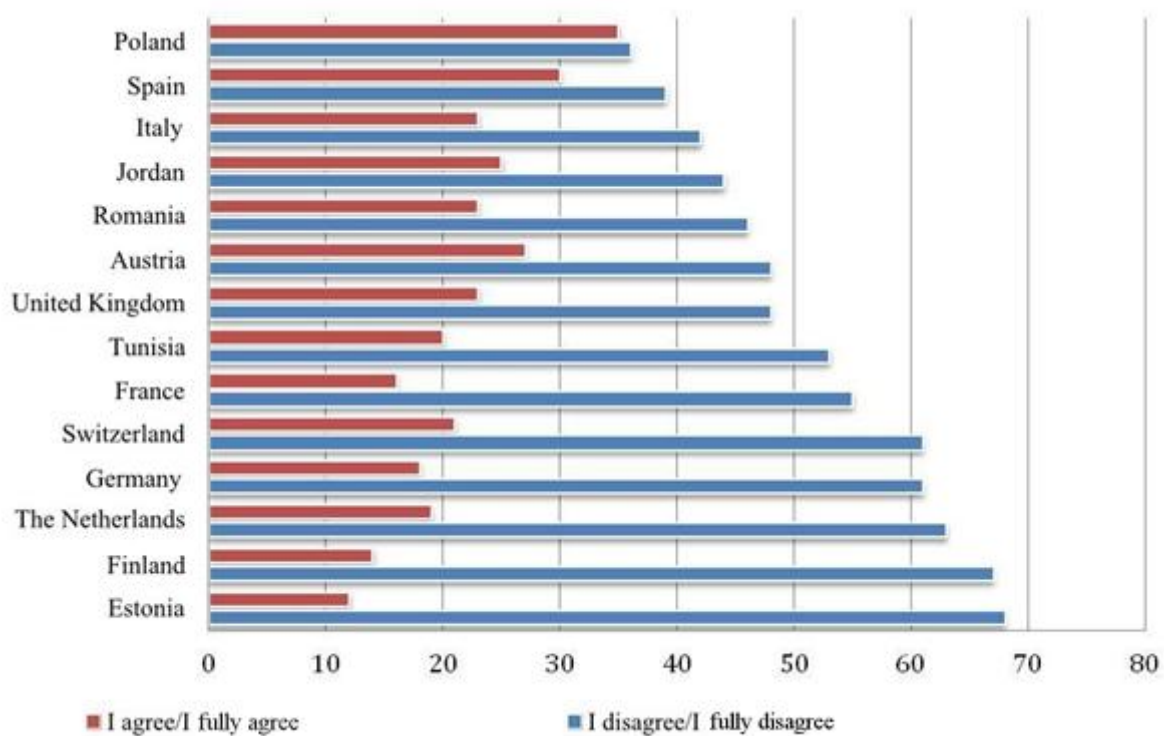[23] Interview with M. Molk, RTV Slovenija (Ljubljana, 5.09.2012).

Figure 7. "The more people know about the way journalists work, the less they trust them"
(per cent of responses)

The data presented above might be seen as a general rejection of the idea of transparency by members of the profession in Poland. In addition, comparative studies have shown, that a small number of media organisations in Poland publish links to original information sources, editorial blogs, ethical codes online or engage in creation of news with the audience via new media platforms[24]. On the other hand, the "MediaAcT" comparative study on online innovations, pointed out the growing role of social media in the process of informing about the creation of news in media organisations. In the course of direct interviews, the insufficient commitment of media employees towards media transparency was explained by the existence of technological and psychological barriers, as well as simply the lack of time[25]. Polish journalists do not differ here from members from media professionals in mature democracies, like for instance from the Netherlands, where the acceptance for the practice of publishing links is low, and co-creation of content was recognised by the country's

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[24] M. Kuś, *Poland: Waiting...*
[25] *Ibidem.*

media experts as an experimental practice. In the Netherlands, like in many other countries, transparency of media organisations is usually achieved by profiles in social media as well as practices enabling users to comment on news and events[26]. These tools have been also widely accepted in the countries of Central and Southern Europe, especially in Serbia and Bulgaria[27].

Conclusions

The conducted research makes it possible to point out the characteristic features of the media accountability in Poland and to define main similarities and differences between Poland and selected countries in Europe.

Comparative studies have proved that Polish media professionals do not differ significantly in how they perceive the levels of accountability and the professional problems of journalism. Like in many European countries, the growing importance of market mechanisms is regarded as a problem for the quality journalism. In addition, a large number of Polish journalists mapped insufficient salary and media hypes in the group of professional problems. Most interestingly, political pressure, which was often considered to have a negative impact on media in Central Europe, was recognised as a serious problem by less than a half of Polish respondents. Overall, the research results show that journalists have taken notice of the external factors which influence the quality of journalism. In addition, they stress the necessity of retaining autonomy from political influence and following ethical standards and rules.

Most members of the profession in Poland positively evaluated the way how journalists fulfil their tasks and duties. A large group of respondents indicated that journalists take into account the criticism from the audience. On the other hand, Polish media professionals were most critical in their evaluation of the role of new media and technologies as well as the audience's interest on media accountability and transparency. The negative assessment of the audience involvement might be explained by technological and psychological barriers, the lack of time, but also by the lack of willingness to engage in the dialogue with media users on the media performance.

The majority of Polish journalists positively evaluated the influence of online innovations promoting transparency of media organisations. However, the positive relationship between the idea of transparency and the level of audience trust in media has not

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[26] H. Groenhart, *Between hope…*
[27] M. Głowacki, M. Kuś, "How much media accountability and transparency in Bulgaria, Poland and Serbia? A comparative approach to online innovations", *Media Transformations* Vol. 7 (2012), pp. 36–57.

been observed. Several practices, including links to the original sources of information and profiles of journalists, co-creation of news have been features of media accountability development in both young and mature democracies.

The conclusions discussed above should be considered in a broader context, taking into account the differences between the types of media, age structure of the respondents, and the function of professionals in a given media organisation. A new broad definition of media accountability should be adopted, while media education and solutions enabling the participation of audience in the process of creating and commenting on content should further be promoted. These are challenges for Poland as well as for many European countries where media accountability is developing in the fast-changing new media environment.