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## THE WAR IN UKRAINE ON THE PAGES OF POLISH WEEKLY OPINION-FORMING MAGAZINES

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### Abstract

The conflict and relations between Poland and Ukraine are an important aspect of the geopolitical reality of Central and Eastern Europe. In the context of changing political, economic and social dynamics, the media play a key role in shaping public opinion and reporting on events between these two countries. In the article, we will analyse the role of the media in the context of the political and economic relations between Poland and Ukraine, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We will focus on how the Polish media present the conflict, and its impact on cooperation and interactions between the two countries. The article will also present the potential impact the media representation of the conflict may have on international relations, including diplomacy, economic cooperation and regional integration. By analysing this issue, we will try to determine the role of the media as a factor influencing the perception and understanding of the relationship between Poland and Ukraine and the need for a critical approach to media narratives in the context of building common understanding and cooperation between the two countries. The content analysis will cover selected issues of weekly magazines representing various sides of the political scene: *Polityka*, *Newsweek* and *Sieci*.

### Keywords

war, Ukraine, opinion-forming magazines, *Polityka*, *Newsweek*, *Sieci*

“The first casualty when war comes is truth” (Hiram Johnson)

## Introduction

The quote above is certainly among the most frequently cited words about war. It was uttered by the American politician Hiram Johnson during his speech in the Senate in 1918, at a time when the First World War was coming to an end (Wawrzuszyn, 2022). It stresses the importance of the truthfulness of information, which becomes a weapon in the information war the parties to an armed conflict wage against each other, alongside military operations. However, in addition to the desire to obtain information about the actions of the enemy while protecting one's own secrets (for instance, using ciphers and cracking them), and to design and apply increasingly effective means of combating disinformation, the role of the media and journalists in reporting on the course of wars and other international conflicts is an important part of research into the issue of access to information about armed conflicts in the broadest sense.

People used to convey information about the course of wars orally and, after the advent of writing, they recorded it in ways typical of those eras. The importance of control over the information imparted to one's subjects is reflected in the decision made in 59 BC by Gaius Julius Caesar, who created the *Acts of the Senate and the People of Rome*, where news about the work of the Senate, the popular assemblies and Caesar's internal and external successes was published. This led to the establishment of the *Acta Diurna Populi Romani*, usually referred to as the *acta diurna* which, according to Zbigniew Bajka (2008), marked the beginning of the European press.

A breakthrough in the relationship between war and the media was signified by the emergence of the journalistic profession of war correspondent. It began with the Crimean War of 1853, and the role played by war correspondents working for the Associated Press during the American Civil War (Bajka 2008). Prior to that, former or current military officers were sent to conflict zones. In 1853, the editors of *The Times* decided to send William Howard Russell, a civilian, to the Crimea. He is the first war correspondent, sending his reports from the ongoing war as letters. Thanks to him British readers for the first time were able to get a real picture of the war in progress, along with the official communiqués of the military (Grządzielski, 2020).

So great was the desire of politicians to control the information provided by journalists that the first and only conflict when American journalists could work with considerable freedom was the Vietnam War. Since then, correspondents have been denied access to the front lines in the subsequent wars fought by the United States of America. Therefore, even in the liberal American media system, each subsequent conflict was covered under some control from the US military (Szurmiński, 2011, p. 80).

Węglińska (2006, pp. 128–129) notes that journalists have long recognised that violence and human tragedy “sell” very well. She cites the research of Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge, who identified twelve factors that make an event newsworthy (including threshold, meaningfulness, unexpectedness, and negativity). She rightly argues that war is a very attractive topic for the mass media because it meets most of the criteria listed by Galtung and Ruge (Węglińska 2006, pp. 128–129).

The importance of research into the mutual connections between war and the media is also evidenced by the fact that an academic journal devoted entirely to this topic, “Media, War & Conflict”, has been published since 2008. It is described as an international, interdisciplinary, peer-reviewed journal dedicated to research that combines war and conflict and the media environment. The journal publishes articles on the cultural, political, social and technological dimensions of conflicts and the consequences of the mediatization of war. In the articles published there, scholars and practitioners identify the challenges posed by the convergence of media, war and conflict. One of the topics is how journalists cover wars and other conflicts (<https://journals.sagepub.com/home/MWC>).

The importance, timeliness and relevance of the topic of how the media report on the war in Ukraine is best demonstrated by the fact that more and more publications on this topic are being published. As an example, the editors of “Media and the War in Ukraine (Mette Mortensen and Mervi Pantti) emphasise that “since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, a new set of media practices and actors have entered the field of contemporary war”. Therefore, the volume examines the ways in which the digital media and communication environment is involved in and shape the war in Ukraine. The chapters in the volume analyse the expanding mesh of media, from mainstream broadcasting and press to social media platforms and the latest digital technologies. The authors of the volume deal with, among other things, media coverage of the war in Ukraine (*Media and the War in Ukraine*, 2023).

Rafał Klepka (2016, pp. 14–17) is right in saying that media coverage of war turns it into a “media event” with most of the features attributed to media events by the creators of this concept, Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz. (Lt. D. Dayan, E. Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, 1992, Harvard University Press). Klepka adds that modern media generally seek sensational topics, which makes disasters, terrorist attacks and wars the most valuable material to hold the audience’s attention for longer. He also points out that the choice of events to cover, the verification of information and informants, how the material is presented and journalistic commentary are all decisions of editorial staff that determine the degree of impartiality of the coverage. He adds that the media can, and usually do, take sides in armed conflicts, most often the side of the country where the media outlet is based (Klepka 2016, pp. 14–17).

Agnieszka Szymańska (2021, pp. 29–30) emphasises the importance the media image of the reported events has for the public, in developing a certain attitude towards them, which can then have a significant impact on the direction of state foreign policy in the area concerned. The same is true for domestic policy (for example, issues of economic, migration, humanitarian or military policy). By analysing the interaction of media and politics (in this case, international politics), Szymańska rightly refers to one of the best-known terms that illustrates the importance of the media in the coverage of armed conflicts, namely the “CNN effect”. It describes the influence that CNN’s coverage had at the time (the 1990s) on politics, diplomacy and the way journalism was practiced in international affairs. The phenomenon stemmed from the fact that CNN’s live coverage of the first Gulf War was followed and treated as an important source of information in foreign ministries and media newsrooms around the world (Szymańska 2021, pp. 29–30).

Therefore, Jakub Idzik and Rafał Klepka (2020, pp. 36–40) are right when they write about the dynamic mediatization and mediatization of war coverage. They see mediatization as a situation in which the media have become the most important source of infor-

mation and means of communication. People rely on the media for information about war in the broadest sense, and politicians seek knowledge about public opinion's assessments and expectations. In this way, knowledge about armed conflicts is mediated, as the mass media are the main channels through which news about war is transmitted. On the other hand, in the context of mediatisation, the importance of this process in the sphere of communication about events such as armed conflicts is significant. Idzik and Klepka point out that the third phase of the war (Hoskins and O'Loughlin's concept), which we are dealing with today, involves the synergy of mainstream media and military operations. The media do not contest the official military version of the war, but support it. The image of combat is more quickly used by the mainstream media for propaganda and promotion of warfare. Thus, the third phase of mediatisation involves a reassertion of the power of the mainstream media and of the power elite. The constant drive to be competitive and expand the news has become easier as traditional media organisations have learned to use digital technology. In the new phase of the war, the news media participate in the spectacle created by the political world. The researchers argue that the situation with "green men" in Ukraine was an act of provocation. Knowing that the "green men" were newsworthy, Russia used the mainstream to mark its presence (Idzik, Klepka 2020, pp. 36–40).

Andrzej Krajewski (2015) illustrates the importance of the coverage of armed conflicts accurately, when he writes that "the US troops won battles in Vietnam, but the media showed their defeats which is why a humiliating retreat awaited them". Therefore, the authors of this study identified their research problem to be the construction of selected media messages about the war in Ukraine, comparing the time when the invasion started (February/March 2022) with the period two years later (February/March 2024). This is because the level of media interest in the topic under study is an important part of the research problem. The importance of this topic is beyond doubt, and a further study of the media coverage of this war should be a valuable addition to the previous research in this area. While the topic of the media's reporting of Russia's war with Ukraine continues to be popular with academics, it seems far from being exhausted. After all, the outbreak of the never-declared Russian-Ukrainian war on February 24 was the biggest shock to the European security system since 1989. The attack was preceded by more than seven years of hybrid war, in which modern technologies had been applied and non-state actors participated, in the informational, cognitive and social spheres.

Magdalene Karalis (2024) clearly states that Russia's full-scale invasion in Ukraine also unleashed a wave of information policy, aiming to influence public opinion, largely in the digital space. Karalis notes that the war in Ukraine has been called, among other things, the first full-scale drone war and the first war using artificial intelligence, and that policymakers in both Russia and Ukraine have found ways to influence public opinion by shaping the war narrative (Karalis, 2024).

At the same time, media interest in war undergoes the same processes as any other issue. The media are always looking for something new to keep their audiences engaged. Therefore, both journalists and media audiences are constantly looking for new topics when they find existing ones outdated or less attractive. Unfortunately, this is also the case with wars, as even wars can become stale, with drastic scenes becoming commonplace over time. This was shown in a study by PSMM Monitoring & More, which reported that, between February 24, 2023 and February 22, 2024, more than 5.8 million news stories and mentions of the war in Ukraine appeared in traditional media, online media and social

networks in Poland. The authors of the report noted that this was over than eleven times less than during the first year after Russia's attack on Ukraine, when the number of publications and mentions exceeded 64 million (data was collected from more than 1,000 press titles, 5 million websites in the Polish language, social media and 100 radio and television stations) (Dolecka 2024).

The decline is particularly noticeable in the traditional media, which featured about 199,000 publications. Michał Potocki (2024) summarises it by saying that the principle that governs the media is that if nothing has changed, then there is no topic, and the frontline stabilised as early as November 2022. In his opinion, at some point there was simply no news. Interestingly, he argues that fewer publications led to an increase in their level. Paulina Czarnek-Wnuk's observation that the topic of the war has grown stale and no longer arouses such emotions as in the first months of the war seems difficult to argue with. On the other hand, the impact of the Russian invasion in Ukraine on February 24, 2022 is best demonstrated by the share of articles on the war in Ukraine, which amounted to 35.4 percent in February 2022 alone (Dolecka 2024).

The authors of this study chose magazine journalism to examine how the war in Ukraine is reported, instead of studying news materials. Therefore, magazines with a socio-political profile were chosen, namely the three most popular Polish opinion-forming weeklies with different editorial policies (socio-political weeklies of a liberal-left, liberal and conservative nature were selected for analysis). The selection was deliberate because, firstly, opinion-forming weeklies are the media that best reflect the political divisions in a country (both within the political class and the public) and, secondly, their readers are mostly well-educated and influential people (opinion leaders).

Tomasz Mielczarek (2007, 34–35) argues that opinion-forming magazines are an extremely important, but gradually disappearing, journalistic form. However, the author wrote these words taking into account the circulation of paper editions of these magazines, which are currently being quite successful in attracting online readers (the number of their digital subscribers is growing). He emphasises that magazines publish information about events in order to shape public opinion and form attitudes. Unlike news journalism, opinion-forming journalism more often expresses an individual awareness, or the author's individual beliefs. Mielczarek is right in observing that this kind of journalism is more clearly individualistic in terms of its subject matter and audience. The rank and importance are not determined by the magazines' circulation, but by the fact that they are material evidence of the intellectual activity of Poles. These magazines are mainly created by people with a broad cultural background and are read by representatives of the intellectual elite (Mielczarek 2007, 34–35).

Mielczarek quotes Walery Pisarek, who argues that weekly magazines are distinguished by featuring thorough commentaries on current phenomena, events and processes, and that their readers are the most educated and sophisticated audience. They can therefore act as opinion leaders in their communities. Describing opinion-forming weeklies, Mielczarek emphasises that this type of journalism does not entirely focus on the most basic function of the media, namely the informational function. Opinion-forming weeklies do not provide the latest news. Instead, they focus on commenting on the news and on shaping public opinions and attitudes. Another feature of opinion-forming weeklies is that they present authors' subjective statements and individualise the message. Polish opinion-forming weeklies feature texts written by prominent scholars, politicians, writers

and clergymen. Mielczarek observes that “they ensure judgments of the highest quality and original insights.” The high quality of the texts is guaranteed by the fact that they have been written by highly esteemed people, the Polish “intelligentsia”. Jerzy Myśliński makes another noteworthy observation, “what was characteristic of the Polish intelligentsia in the twentieth century was precisely the constant contact with the opinion-forming press” (Mielczarek, 2018, pp. 24–35). There is no reason to claim that the same is true for the importance of opinion-forming magazines in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, nevertheless the Polish intelligentsia (and not only) is increasingly reading their online editions. All this clearly justifies the authors’ choice of weekly opinion-forming magazines, which remain an important medium, to examine how the most important Polish magazines of this type have covered the war in Ukraine.

At the same time, the authors would like to emphasise that the present research is a pilot study and was conducted on a limited research sample. Their results are primarily intended to provide a rationale for conducting similar studies in the future.

## Research methodology and assumptions

The research method chosen in this study is analysis of message content, which means “breaking [content] down into simpler elements or distinguishing its features, characteristics and elements and classifying them in line with the accepted system of categories” (Pisarek, 1983, 29). Content analysis takes into account the features identified by one of its first researchers, Bernard Berelson, addressing only the syntactic and semantic elements of the message, and is objective, systematic and quantitative (Pisarek, 1983, 29). Choosing among the types of content analysis identified (Michalczyk, 2009, 98–99), such as frequency and thematic analysis, evaluation and assessment analysis, argumentative analysis, and electronic analysis, frequency and thematic analysis was applied, which makes it possible to find out the frequency of topics or actors and certain trends over a defined period of time. In frequency and thematic analysis, topics and actors are treated as symbols of importance that appear in articles that occupy a certain space.

The authors of this study analysed the issues of three weeklies: *Newsweek Polska* (later on: *Newsweek*), *Polityka* and *Sieci*. *Polityka* is a Polish opinion-forming socio-political weekly of a liberal-leftist nature (Prasa w Polsce, nd). The weekly has been published since 1957 in Warsaw. *Newsweek* is a liberal weekly considered to be one of the most opinion-forming magazines in Poland. This magazine remains an important segment of the media market, which is also a valuable source of information for recipients particularly interested in current affairs on a social and political level (Mateja, 2022). The magazine *Sieci* is a conservative weekly opinion magazine in Poland. The magazine has been published since 2012 and comments on Polish political, social and cultural matters (*Sieci – największy konserwatywny tygodnik opinii w Polsce, [nd]*). These magazines were deliberately chosen as weekly opinion-forming magazines with the highest sales in Poland. According to the PBC research agency (press.pl, 2024), *Polityka*’s average sales in the first quarter of 2024 amounted to 80,464 copies, including 55,379 printed and 25,086 online issues. Compared to the first quarter of 2023, *Polityka*’s average sales decreased by 2.5%, but the weekly still ranked first in Poland. *Newsweek Polska* (Ringier Axel Springer Polska) was second with an average of 61,849 copies (an increase of 5.2%), including 44,733 print-

ed and 17,116 online issues. The weekly magazine *Sieci* (Fratrion) came third with 33,066 copies (an increase of 14.2%), including 26,057 printed and 7,009 online issues.

The analysis concerned three consecutive issues from 2022, after the full-scale war broke out (the issues of the magazines cover the first weeks of the Russian invasion on February 24, 2022) and 2024 (the second anniversary of the Russian invasion):

1. *Newsweek*, 2022, issues 8–10 covering the period from February 21, 2022 to March 13, 2022;
2. *Newsweek*, 2024, issues 8–10 covering the period from February 19, 2024 to March 10, 2024;
3. *Polityka*, 2022, issues 9–11 covering the period from February 23, 2022 to March 15, 2022;
4. *Polityka*, 2024, issues 9–11 covering the period from February 21, 2024 to March 13, 2024;
5. *Sieci*, 2022, issues 8–10 covering the period from February 21, 2022 to March 13, 2022;
6. *Sieci*, 2024, issues 8–10 covering the period from February 19, 2024 to March 10, 2024.

A total of 18 issues were analysed.

The authors defined the research objectives as follows:

1. To determine the manner of presenting the subject of the war in Ukraine in the analysed magazines (journalistic genres, thematic threads, linguistic formulations).
2. To determine the content of a political and economic-social nature in journalistic materials concerning the subject of the war in Ukraine.
3. To analyse graphic materials accompanying journalistic materials or constituting a separate material concerning the subject of the war in Ukraine.

Being aware of the potential offered by content analysis and of the fragmentary nature of their study, the authors formulated the following research questions:

1. How was the topic of the war in Ukraine presented in the magazines?
2. Which journalistic genres were dominant in the coverage of the war in Ukraine?
3. What were the main topics of the journalistic materials?
4. Were there any characteristic phrases or terms used with reference to Ukraine, Ukrainians, Russia, and Russians and, if so, what were they?
5. Who did the authors of the journalistic materials quote?
6. What political content was presented?
7. What economic and social content was presented?
8. How were the graphic materials that accompanied the reports, or which constituted separate materials, designed?

Given those research questions, a coding key was constructed. The coding key used in the analysis included six categories:

1. Organising function:
  - a) name of the journal in which the text was published;
  - b) publication date;
  - c) title of the text;
  - d) names of its author/co-authors;
  - e) the number of texts in a given issue, including texts on the war in Ukraine;
  - f) announcement of materials about Ukraine on the cover page;

- g) genre (interview, article, commentary, in-depth report, photo-reportage, mention, account, note, opinion column, other);
  - h) volume of the text;
  - i) subject of the text: politics, economy, social issues, war, sports, education, culture, agriculture, entertainment, health, human interest story, other;
  - j) tone of the text;
2. Categories related to the language of the coded text of the press release:
    - a) terms/phrases related to Ukraine and used by the author of the material and in quotes from experts, politicians and so on, if any;
    - b) terms related to Ukrainians and used by the author of the material and in quotes from experts, politicians, and so on, if any;
    - c) terms/phrases related to Russia and used by the author of the material;
    - d) terms/phrases related to Russia in quotes from experts, politicians and so on, if any;
    - e) terms referring to Russians and used by the author of the material;
    - f) terms referring to Russians in quotes from experts, politicians, and so on, if any;
  3. Citations and actors in texts related to the war in Ukraine:
    - a) Polish politicians,
    - b) Ukrainian politicians,
    - c) European politicians,
    - d) US politicians,
    - e) Russian politicians,
    - f) expert/s (Polish, Ukrainian, European, US),
    - g) ordinary persons/s (Poles, Ukrainians),
    - h) political actors (presidents, prime ministers, politicians);
  4. Presentation of political content:
    - a) references to the Volhynia Massacre in the material;
    - b) information about Ukraine's political relations in the past;
    - c) information about current political relations (current at the time of a particular issue of the magazine);
  5. Presentation of economic and social content:
    - a) information about the economic situation in Ukraine;
    - b) information about economic relations between Ukraine and Poland;
    - c) information on the amount of economic aid provided by Poland;
    - d) information on possible concessions, exemptions and benefits for Ukrainians coming to Poland, information on administrative issues concerning Ukrainians in Poland;
    - e) information about the situation of Ukrainian women in Poland;
    - f) the issue of Ukrainians who work or stay in Poland despite meeting the draft conditions for the Ukrainian army;
    - g) education of Ukrainian children and youth;
  6. Graphic materials that accompany texts
    - a) type of graphics: photo, poster, infographic, other;
    - b) main elements of the graphic material;
    - c) colors;

- d) size;
- e) number of graphic materials in one text;
- f) tone of the graphic material.

## Analysis of the survey results

The analysis of materials in terms of the first category, organising function, demonstrates that the amount of material shrank in 2024 compared to 2022. On the one hand, the decrease is natural and predictable, as the magazine readers' interest in the topic may dwindle with time. On the other hand, it continues to be highly relevant, since Poland is on the border of the European Union, and the war and unstable situation in Ukraine represents a direct risk.

Issues of the magazines in the analysed period of 2022 contained a high percentage of articles on the war in Ukraine. In *Newsweek*, 19.44% (21) of the content concerned the war in Ukraine, distributed in the three analysed issues as follows: No. 8 – 2.94% (1), No. 9 – 29.41% (10), No. 10 – 25% (10). The percentage of material in the three issues of *Polityka* amounted to 13.84% (22) of the content (No. 9 – 3.51% (2), No. 10 – 19.23% (10), No. 11 – 20% (10)) and for *Sieci* it was 10% (15) (No. 8 – 2.08% (1), No. 9 – 8% (4), No. 10 – 19.23% (10)).

A significant decrease was observed when comparing the contents in 2024. In the three analysed issues of *Newsweek*, the average amounted to 5% (5) (No. 8 – 6.9% (2), No. 9 – 3.33% (1), No. 10 – 4.88% (2)), for *Polityka* it was 2.84% (5) (No. 9 – 5.36% (3), No. 10 – 1.67% (1), No. 11 – 1.67% (1)) and for *Sieci* it was 5.38% (7) (No. 8 – 4.55% (2), No. 9 – 2.27% (1), No. 10 – 9.52% (4)). In 2024, most content was published in the first analysed issue of the magazine, which was connected with the second anniversary of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In the 2022 *Newsweek* issues analysed, the main genres of journalistic materials were interviews (28.57%; 6) and articles (28.57%; 6), while in 2024 the dominant genres were interviews (40%; 2), mentions (40%; 2) and opinion columns (20%; 1). In *Polityka*, in 2022, the topic appeared mainly in articles (45.45%; 10), interviews (18.18%; 4) and opinion columns (13.64%; 3), while in 2024 the dominant genre could not be distinguished (article, in-depth report, commentary, note, opinion column – 20% (1) each). In 2022, the journalists of the *Sieci* magazine mainly produced articles (46.67%; 7), but interviews (20%; 3) and opinion columns (20%; 3) were also present, while two years later it was articles (57.14%; 4) and opinion columns (42.86%; 3).

The purpose of the analysis of the materials was to indicate also their subject matter. Each material analysed could be classified into the categories of politics, economy/business, social issues, life during war, war (military issues), sports, education, culture, agriculture, international politics, health and human interest story. In the 2022 *Newsweek* issues analysed, the categories of politics (26.23%; 16) and war (22.95%; 14) clearly stood out. *Polityka* covered the war in Ukraine in a similar way, with the category of international politics (18.57%; 13) prominent alongside the previous two categories (politics: 22.86%, 16; war: 25.71%, 18). Four thematic categories were clearly identified in *Sieci*: politics (22%; 11), war (24%; 12), life during war (16%; 8) and international politics (16%; 8).

In 2024, the thematic categories of the materials created were similar, although not as clearly marked. Categories that were virtually absent in 2022 became more pronounced.

In *Newsweek*, journalistic materials were organised around the themes of war (31.25%; 5), economy/business (18.75%; 3), politics (12.5%; 2), social issues (12.5%; 2) and life during war (12.5%; 2). In contrast, the journalistic material in *Polityka* focused more on the war (28.57%; 4), politics (21.43%; 3) and international politics (21.43%; 3), but also touched on economy/business (7.14%; 1), social issues (7.14%; 1), life during war (7.14%; 1) and human interest stories (7.14%; 1). *Sieci* also expanded to other categories, and while politics (26.92%; 7), war (26.92%; 7) and international politics (23.08%; 6) were still very prominent, the economy/business category emerged strongly (15.38%; 4).

The subject matter of journalistic materials in 2022 compared to 2024 seems to correspond to the time in which these materials were created. Journalistic materials created in 2022 were created in the first period of Russian aggression in Ukraine, hence the clear predominance of content regarding politics, war and international politics. The analysed journalistic materials from 2024 supplement the previously present with issues regarding economics, social issues or life during the war. This results from the experience of two years of war, when, apart from the defence of the country, economic and social consequences were already noticeable.

By examining categories related to the language of the coded press text, an attempt was made to isolate terms and phrases related to the direct parties to the war – Ukraine and Russia, both as states and nationalities (people). The content analysis carried out within the study did not reveal any phrases pertaining to Ukraine and Ukrainians (both in 2022 and 2024) that could be considered distinctive or special, both at the level of the language of the authors of the materials and in quotes from experts, politicians and others. On the other hand, phrases were identified concerning Russia (“quasi-fascist government” (Nowicki, 2022); “Russia is a gas station with nuclear weapons” (Nowicki, 2022); a paraphrase of the words by the defenders of the Snake Island: “go f\*\*\* yourself” (Andrijanić, 2022)) and Russians (“Russians have been practicing the art of humiliating people and countries for centuries” (Sadurski, 2022); “beasts” (Maciejewski (2024)); statements about Vladimir Putin: “He is a representative of the same species as Hitler, only he is an even more perfect incarnation of evil, because Hitler had some human emotions and ambitions in him, he painted pictures” (Pawlicki, 2022) or the “bin Laden of the Kremlin” (Nalaskowski, 2022)).

In 2024, when the war had been going on for two years, and the war reports were pictures of the brutality, cruelty and ruthlessness of Russian soldiers, a journalist’s description of Russian soldiers appeared (“This is what they must be called – they are barbarians, fascists, rapists, torturers. They are simply criminals who should be brought to justice” (Pawlicki (2024)).

The analysed materials included numerous quotes from representatives of the international community, as well as from the countries at war (Table 1–2). Among others, *Newsweek* quoted the words of representatives of the Russian administration, EU and German politicians and Polish, EU and US experts and journalists. There were also statements from Ukrainian citizens, most often in materials qualified as human interest stories. A similar diversity of people quoted was noted in *Polityka*, where the materials featured representatives of the Council of Europe, US Vice President Kamala Harris, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski, Russian President Vladimir Putin, representatives of the international administration and EU, European (Ukrainian and British), US and Russian experts. There were also statements from Polish and Ukrainian citizens, similarly to *Newsweek*, most often in materials qualified as human interest stories. The least diverse

quotations were found in the materials in *Sieci*, where the authors focused on statements from Ukrainian representatives, whether politicians, experts or journalists (in the role of commentators). There were some statements of Polish citizens (human interest story, the topic of aiding Ukraine) and representatives of Polish politicians (not only from the government at the time, for instance, Polish President Andrzej Duda, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, Minister of Sport Kamil Bortniczuk, but also from the opposition, for example, Donald Tusk, Borys Budka); statements by deceased persons were also quoted (for instance, Polish President Lech Kaczyński).

Among the numerous actors in the materials analysed, the presence of two natural protagonists was strongly felt, namely Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenski and Russian President Vladimir Putin. While in 2022 there was a greater diversity of actors, with reference to Ukrainian and Russian internal politics and to international politics, in 2024 the presidents of the warring states dominated.

When analysing the political content, two aspects of Polish-Ukrainian relations were highlighted, namely the description of historical relations (both dating back to the time before the Russian invasion of 2022, and further back, including the Volhynia Massacre as one of the most difficult issues) and the context of current political relations (current at the time of the particular issue of the magazine).

*Newsweek's* material in 2022 focused on current (50%; 1) and historical (50%; 1) relations, but did not mention the tragedy of the Volhynia Massacre. This topic appeared neither in *Polityka* nor in *Sieci*, but the theme of political and pre-war relations (66.67%; 2) was more pronounced than that of current relations (33.33%; 1). In 2024, *Newsweek* made a reference to the Volhynia Massacre (16.67%; 1) while continuing the topics of historical politics (33.33%; 2) and current relations (50%; 3). Interestingly, the materials in *Polityka* in 2024 did not refer to the content of political relations, whether historical or current at the time of the publication. In the case of *Sieci*, the topic of historical and current political relations was represented to the same extent (50% each; 1). The lack of a clear mention of the Volhynia Massacre is puzzling, as this issue has been a significant challenge for years and is also used in the social space as an element of political communication.

As concerns the economic and social content, the authors analysed whether or not the topics related to the economic issues in Ukraine were present, but also in relation to Poland. For instance, the issues related to aid provided to Ukrainians, or ensuring that they had places to live in their new country, or topics related to the situation of Ukrainian women and children in Poland (education-related topics). In 2022, economic and social news more often touched on the topics that were relevant in the first weeks of the war, when Ukrainian citizens fleeing the war were looking for accommodation and work, and were uncertain about their status (documents, PESEL identification numbers, and other administrative matters). The leading topics in *Newsweek* were the economic situation in Ukraine (33.33%; 3), information about possible concessions, exemptions and benefits for Ukrainians coming to Poland, about administrative issues concerning Ukrainians in Poland (22.22%; 2), and about the situation of Ukrainian women in Poland (22%; 2). The topic of Ukrainians staying in Poland instead of fighting in Ukraine against Russia was also present.

*Polityka* featured the largest number of socio-economic topics, with three most prominent ones being:

- Information about the economic situation in Ukraine (25%; 6),

**Table 1.** Statements – quotes or travesties – in the analysed materials (2022) dealing with the topic of Russian aggression in Ukraine

Weekly	Issue number	Date	Polish politicians	Ukrainian politicians
Newsweek	8/2022	21–27.02.2022		
Newsweek	9/2022	28.02–6.03.2022		
Newsweek	10/2022	7–13.03.2022		
Polityka	9/2022	23.02–1.03.2022		President of Ukraine
Polityka	10/2022	2.03–8.03.2022		President of Ukraine
Polityka	11/2022	9–13.03.2022		
Sieci	8/2022	21–27.02.2022		
Sieci	9/2022	28.02–6.03.2022	President of Poland (Andrzej Duda), Prime Minister of Poland (Mateusz Morawiecki), Minister of Sport (Kamil Bortniczuk), opposition politicians (Donald Tusk, Borys Budka, Waldemar Pawlak)	President of Ukraine
Sieci	10/2022	7–13.03.2022	Deceased President of Poland (Lech Kaczyński)	

Source: Author's own research.

- Information about the amount of economic aid from Poland to Ukraine (20.83%; 5),
- Information about possible concessions, exemptions, and benefits for Ukrainians coming to Poland, and about administrative issues concerning Ukrainians in Poland (20.83%; 5).

*Sieci* featured the least variety of topics, with only two clearly pronounced ones, namely the economic situation in Ukraine (50%; 1) and the amount of Polish economic aid to Ukraine (50%; 1).

In 2024, the absence of the topic of administrative issues was natural, because administrative procedures were put in place, which greatly facilitated and changed the living situation of Ukrainians. Articles focused mainly on the economic issues of Poland and Ukraine. *Newsweek* featured prominent topics such as Ukraine's economy (33.33%; 1), Ukrainian-Polish economic relations (33.33%; 1) and the amount of Poland's economic

European politicians	American politicians	Russian politicians	Experts (Polish, Ukrainian, European, American)	Journalist as an expert	Ordinary people (Poles)	Ordinary people (Ukrainians)
						1
German politicians (German Chancellor; German Minister of Economy)		In the rank of ambassador	Polish expert	1		1
European Parliament			Polish expert, European expert, American expert			2
			Ukrainian expert			
		President of Russia	Ukrainian expert, British expert	1		2
			British expert, American expert, Russian expert, Polish expert,		1	2
						1
			Ukrainian expert (2)			

aid to Ukraine (33.33%; 1). *Polityka* did not feature any content that would correspond to the categories identified in the coding key, while *Sieci* focused solely on economic news related to the amount of Polish aid (100%; 1).

While examining the graphic materials on the war in Ukraine, in the analysed issues of the magazines, it was found that photographs were the main form. This was true for 89.47% (17) of graphic materials in *Newsweek*, 69.57% (16) in *Polityka*, and 92.31% (12) in *Sieci*. Other forms that accompanied texts or appeared as a separate genre (photo-reportage) were infographics and maps (presentation of the situation on the frontline). The situation in 2024 was similar, with photographs accounting for the overwhelming majority of graphic materials: 100% (2) in *Newsweek* and 75% (3) in *Polityka* and *Sieci* (3) each.

The analysis of the main graphic elements included in the graphic materials (2022), demonstrated that *Newsweek* featured three prominent trends: scenes depicting combat

**Table 2.** Statements – quotes or travesties – in the analysed materials (2024) dealing with the topic of Russian aggression in Ukraine

Weekly	Issue number	Date	Polish politicians	Ukrainian politicians	Experts (Polish, Ukrainian, European, American)	Journalist as an expert
Newsweek	8/2024	19–25.02.2024				
Newsweek	9/2024	26.02–3.03.2024				
Newsweek	10/2024	4–10.03.2024		President of Ukraine		
Polityka	9/2022	21–27.02.2024				
Polityka	10/2022	28.02–5.03.2024		President of Ukraine		
Polityka	11/2022	6–12.03.2024				
Sieci	8/2022	19–25.02.2024			Polish expert	1
Sieci	9/2022	26.02–3.03.2024				
Sieci	10/2022	4–10.03.2024	Consul of the Republic of Poland in Ukraine, Donald Tusk		Ukrainian expert	1

Source: Author's own research.

or life in the time of war (pictures from trenches and places where soldiers live, everyday life) (32.14%; 9), photographs with politicians (28.57%; 8) and photographs with anonymous people (21.43%; 6). Similar prominent topics occurred in *Polityka*, featuring war-related scenes (34.38%; 11), anonymous people (28.13%; 9) and photographs with politicians (15.63%; 5). Graphic material was most varied in *Sieci*, with the two dominant types of photographs being scenes depicting life in the time of war or war (30%; 9) and anonymous figures (23.33%; 7).

## Conclusion

The study confirmed the validity of the analysis of weekly opinion-forming magazines in general, including the topic of Ukrainian discussed in this text. All three magazines examined here dealt with the topic of the war in Ukraine, each of them provided interesting information and, above all, opinions and expert comments on the issue of Russia's war with Ukraine. This is confirmed by the fact that interviews in each magazine were significant parts of the material devoted to the war.

The analysis confirmed what might have been predicted, and indicated by other studies and opinions cited in the introduction, namely a decrease in the amount of material in 2024 compared to 2022. However, even at the pivotal and most “medial” moment, namely Russia’s attack on Ukraine in February and March 2022, contrary to assumptions, the topic of war did not prevail in the content of the issues under analysis, and the share of materials devoted to the conflict can be described at most as „relatively high”, with emphasis on the word “relatively”. For *Newsweek* in 2022, 19.44% (21) of the content was about the war in Ukraine, for *Polityka* the proportion of material in the three issues was 13.84% (22), and for *Sieci* it was 10% (15). A significant decrease was noted in 2024. For *Newsweek*, the average in the three issues analysed was only 5% (5), for *Polityka* it was 2.84% (5), and for *Sieci* it was 5.38% (7). This confirms the findings of various previous studies that the media are primarily interested in the internal affairs of the countries in which they operate and in whose language they publish. However, Poland’s neighbours are fighting a war that has been affecting the functioning of the country on many levels (refugees, military aid, economic problems and agriculture) since it broke out. Therefore, it seems that opinion-forming magazines should deal with this topic more extensively, the more so as it has not lost any of its relevance in 2024.

The subject matter of journalistic materials in 2022 compared to 2024 seems to correspond to the time in which these materials were created. Analysis of materials from 2022 showed a predominance of content on politics, war and international politics. In 2024, they were supplemented with content on economics, social issues or life during war, which is related to the experiences of Ukraine, which was directly affected by the economic and social consequences, as well as Poland, which indirectly participated in these experiences (migration of war refugees).

Another interesting observation is that although the three magazines significantly differ in terms of topics dealing with domestic politics (which results from their respective editorial policies, primarily from their different assessments of the internal political situation), the differences do not apply to the war in Ukraine and their general attitude to the parties to the conflict (as illustrated by the assessments of Russia’s and Vladimir Putin’s acts cited in the text).

The authors emphasise that the presented research was a pilot study and is planned to be realised on a larger research sample.

The previous research directions will be maintained: [1] To determine the manner of presenting the subject of the war in Ukraine in the analysed magazines (journalistic genres, thematic threads, linguistic formulations); [2] to analyse the content of a political and economic-social nature in journalistic materials concerning the subject of the war in Ukraine; [3] to analyse graphic materials accompanying journalistic materials or constituting a separate material concerning the subject of the war in Ukraine.

The authors of the research plan to deepen the analysis of the presence of political actors in journalistic materials and the analysis of graphic materials included in journalistic materials.

In spite of the printed press going through a crisis (counteracted by attempts to develop through subscriptions and online editions), opinion-forming magazines continue to be an important element of the media system in Poland, and they attempt to publish content (opinions, comments and analyses) that will have an impact on public opinion in Poland and provide a valuable source for politicians and persons whose interest in the socio-po-

litical life in Poland is above average. The authors believe that this fragmentary study justifies further research in this area.

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