Euroscepticism in a Pro-European State on the Basis of Media Content Analysis[1]

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Abstract: *Against the background of research conducted in other EU countries, Euroscepticism is a marginal sentiment among Poles. Nevertheless, this attitude and the arguments associated with it are noticeable in many areas in the public space: among members of the public presenting Eurosceptic arguments on the social media, journalists in press commentaries or politicians themselves. The aim of this article is to analyse the scale of such statements, their specific character and presence in the Polish press during the election and post-electoral period in 2015–2017. The study involved content analysis of selected text units which allowed the fundamental research question to be answered—namely, what is the nature of Eurosceptic attitudes manifested in the Polish press during the electoral/post-electoral period of lively discussions on the role of the European Union in Poland.*

Keywords: *content analysis, Euroscepticism, media, Poland*

1.   Introduction

Although Eurosceptic sentiments have been present among the public since the beginning of the European integration process (Vasilopoulou, 2013), the term featured for the first time in the British press in 1985 (Vasilopoulou, 2017).[2] 'Euroscepticism' as a concept is over thirty years old then and—in the most literal sense—refers to someone who is against the idea of the European Union or European integration (Brack & Startin, 2015). Before the 1992 Maastricht Treaty, Eurosceptic attitudes appeared marginal (Brack & Startin, 2015). On the other hand, there is no doubt that European integration has always been questioned and shaped by important historical events and deep crises (Crespy & Verschueren, 2009; Ross, 2011). That is why studies on Euroscepticism also gained momentum at the time of important, as well as polarising events embracing the whole of Europe (European Constitution, Lisbon Treaty, migration crisis, Brexit, etc.). Whenever the term 'Euroscepticism' features in the context of clearly articulated national political debates, its meaning should be understood in relation to the different national political traditions and experiences of European integration that shape these debates (Harmsen & Spierling, 2004, p. 17).

Today, both Euroscepticism as such and studies on it are highly diverse and depend on the cognitive perspective adopted, and the definition or methodology used. An important area of research carried out concerns the scale of Eurosceptic attitudes and standpoints. Eurobarometer is the most comprehensive, cyclical dataset in this field of pan-European coverage. A study commissioned by the EU twice a year examines EU citizens' attitudes to many problems, including integration. However, the word 'Euroscepticism' does not appear in the context of Eurobarometer surveys and reports.

Among experts in the field of party systems studies, the main academic dispute over the Eurosceptic standpoints of collective entities concerns the influence of ideologies and strategies on those entities. A group of researchers commonly known as the North Carolina School (Mudde, 2011) insists on explaining the issue at the level of political parties. In contrast, the Sussex School emphasises country-specific factors, such as the electoral system, the structure of party competition and the goals of individual parties (Brack & Startin, 2015). Party-oriented analyses mainly include their manifestos, official positions and other

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[2]   According to other sources, this word first appeared in print in *The Economist* on 26 December 1992, in an article describing the reaction of the German public to European integration after Germany had been instructed to adapt beer purity rules to internal market requirements (Hooghe & Marks, 2007).

content demonstrating a Eurosceptic attitude. An important research theme concerns the exploration of the activities of Eurosceptic parties and groups, such as independence parties, radical right-wing parties, left-wing parties, Eurosceptic parties in the strict sense, anti-EU blocks in the European Parliament and non-partisan pressure groups (Usherwood & Startin, 2013). These studies include both content analysis and qualitative analyses of parties commonly seen as Eurosceptic from individual European countries, including the most frequently recurring Alternative für Deutschland (Grimm, 2015; Arzheimer, 2015; Less, 2015), SYRIZA (Verney, 2015), Jobbik (Lázár, 2015), Kongres Nowej Prawicy (Lasoń, 2011) and other.[3]

An important area, addressed also by the research carried out for the purposes of this article, is the broadly understood nature of Euroscepticism. It includes attempts at conceptualising the term (Taggart, 1998; Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2002), creating a typology (Kopecky & Mudde, 2002)[4] and constructing a scale of attitudes, from rejecting the EU to an affirmative attitude (Flood & Usherwood, 2007; Rovny, 2004). From the research point of view, the types of Eurosceptic attitudes distinguished with respect to their causes are of particular importance, such as economic, democratic, independence and socio-political grounds (Sørensen, 2008; Chalmers, 2013) as well as anti-systemic, anti-establishment or sector-oriented (Beneš, Chalániová & Eberle, 2016). These distinctions, as well as perceiving Euroscepticism in terms of a populist strategy, allowed its level to be examined in the statements published in articles in Polish dailies and weeklies.

Given the above-presented theoretical concept and classifications, as well as the method selected, the following research hypotheses (RH) were identified to be verified:

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[3]   Considerations on British Euroscepticism are a separate category in the literature. The United Kingdom is a unique example in comparison with other European countries, especially due to the fact that the term 'Euroscepticism' emerged in the British public sphere and has "materialized" as Brexit. Although Eurosceptic attitudes have been demonstrated in numerous studies on individual member states, the United Kingdom has always been considered 'suspicious' in this respect and was part of the mainstream Euroscepticism often considered as a typically British phenomenon (Smith, 2005). Therefore, studies into the cultural implications of Eurosceptic attitudes, their use for political gain and the consequences of Euroscepticism form part of the 'British' scope of research (Straw, 2011; Starin, 2015; Kasonta, 2015; Usherwood, Leruth & Startin, 2017).

[4]   A two-dimensional scale featuring four categories: Euroenthusiasts, Europragmatists, Eurosceptics and Eurorejects.

RH 1. Euroscepticism was frequently used as a strategy during the election and post-electoral period in Poland in 2015–2017, mainly by right-wing politicians and journalists.

RH 2. Euroscepticism as a populist strategy is mainly anti-elitist in the Polish public sphere.

2. Theoretical framework

Euroscepticism is most often understood as an a t t i t u d e . The term is made of the prefix 'Euro-' and the word 'scepticism.'[5] It is a neologism used to describe an attitude of people who doubt the sense or usefulness of the European Union. The noun 'Eurosceptic' is therefore a kind of 'barometer' that can measure the lack of support for the concept of the European Union in a given population (Condruz-Băcescu, 2014).

Euroscepticism understood in terms of an attitude should be defined as

> *the lack of support for intensive, deepened processes of European integration observed in EU Member States and the opposition to integration policy in countries aspiring to membership. This concept is rooted in the reluctance to transfer parts of state sovereignty to international organisations or joint structures, the lack of conviction as to the economic benefits of integration, the fear of domination by foreign capital or labour forces, the lack of faith in the sense or success of integration processes, and the fear of losing national identity and traditional values.* (Pacześniak, 2010)

Euroscepticism is definitely less often defined as an i d e o l o g y . On the basis of the practice of the French political scene, Sam Benoit believes Euroscepticism is an ideological formation embraced by the category of Social-Nationalism. Christopher Flood uses (inconsistently) the term 'Eurosceptic ideology' (after Zuba, 2006, p. 18). The attitude of opposition to European integration is much more often considered in relation to ideologies, constituting their part—a programmatic or conceptual element. Although Conservatism (in particular

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[5] Scepticism is often erroneously confused with distrust or suspicion. The word 'sceptic' (Greek: *σκέπτομαι*, French: *Sceptique*) entered the European languages from Greek during the Renaissance and originally meant an 'observer' or 'researcher'. Therefore, sceptics should only express reasonable doubt while rejecting dogmatism (Condruz-Băcescu, 2014).

British Conservatism) is often indicated as the 'birthplace' of Eurosceptic thinking, there is no doubt that at present it is impossible to attribute this way of thinking about Europe to a specific ideology, thus depriving other, developed ideological currents the right to incorporate Euroscepticism into their own conceptual systems. Perhaps, following Freeden (1996), the terms 'integration' and 'disintegration' should be classified as *core*, *adjacent* or *peripheral* concepts, in an attempt to inquire about the place of Euroscepticism in individual, contemporary right- and left-wing formations.

Contrary to this way of understanding Euroscepticism are its definitions as a strategy. This tradition of thinking about Euroscepticism, which has been grounded in the studies of Taggart and Szczerbiak (2001), sees that the role of ideology (which is often a 'smokescreen' for political actions) has weakened and ideologies now focus on the particular interests of political subjects instead, which results in pragmatic actions. Here, Euroscepticism should be understood as an indicator of populism or even as a p o p u l i s t   c o m m u n i c a t i o n   s t r a t e g y .

Populism is a superior concept which should be understood in terms of a strategy resulting from the rationalisation of political goals. Social demand, which is an outcome of a populist narrative based on the concept of the people and deliberately addressing their needs, results in the use of rhetorical or even programmatic instruments selected from the whole spectrum of ideological concepts ranging from extreme right- to left-wing. Euroscepticism, as quite a universal category which is easily adaptable across almost the entire spectrum, often becomes a politically useful element.

In the context of studies on Polish political discourse, Paweł Przyłęcki quite clearly indicates Euroscepticism/anti-Europeanism as one of the determinants of populism, defining it as "proclaiming slogans aimed at inculcating fear in society and fears of Poland's accession to and presence in EU structures" (Przyłęcki, 2012). He argues that this characterised the populist discourse before accession, and after 2004 took a passive form of conducting a negative information campaign against the EU and contesting all major decisions taken within the EU. Anna Pacześniak adds that populism is frequently identified with Euroscepticism (which is an obvious abuse) and that "the increasingly extensive EU *acquis*, complex decision-making processes, and difficult-to-understand relations between individual EU institutions and member states are a breeding ground for anti-European populism" (Pacześniak, 2010).

It is not a marginal phenomenon in social sciences that populism and Euroscepticism are combined (in different configurations), both by renowned authors studying the two phenomena in Europe (Taggart & Szczerbiak, 2004; Kopecky & Mudde, 2002) and the authors of analyses conducted in Poland (Nalewajko, 2004; Jasiewicz, 2004). This is a result of Euroscepticism approached as a kind of exemplification of the premises of populist discourse in a specific place and a political cultural and context. Eurosceptic attitudes fit well into the basic triad of a populist strategy based on anti-elitism (here: towards EU institutions and the politicians themselves), exclusion of others (here: residents and politicians of other European countries) and considering the will of the people (here: as opposed to the undemocratically elected EU authorities). In the context of studies on populism, it is worth examining how significant its anti-European component is in Poland, in particular taking into account the exceptionally high level of Poles' support for the EU compared to the inhabitants of other countries of the Old Continent.

3.   Methodology and results

Regular studies commissioned by the European Commission clearly indicate that Poles are among the least Eurosceptic nations in the EU. In 2019, 68% of Poles believed that EU membership was generally beneficial (7% more than the EU average). The dynamics of this opinion is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Percentage of Poles with a favourable opinion about EU membership (2007–2019)
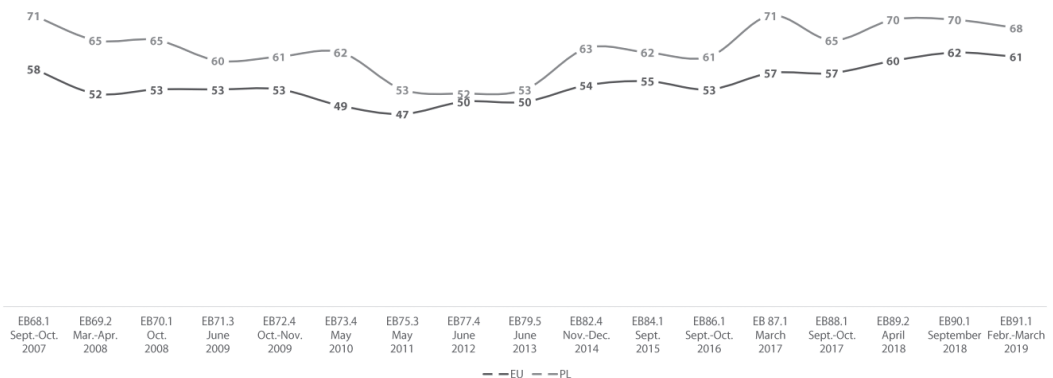

Source: Eurobarometer, 2019

Of respondents, 57% also believe that their voice matters in the EU (6% more than the EU average), while 86% of respondents indicate that EU membership brings more benefits than losses (as much as 18% more than the EU average). It might seem that, with pro-EU sentiments prevailing in society, the Eurosceptic discourse will be rather marginal. This is not the case, however, both in the long-term perspective of the thirty years of intensive relations between Poland and the EU and in terms of changes in the narrative in the state's policy after 2015.

The above statement is founded on a content analysis of Polish printed press (dailies: *Fakt* [tabloid], *Gazeta Wyborcza* [liberal], *Nasz Dziennik* [conservative], *Rzeczpospolita* [centrist] and weeklies: *Do Rzeczy* [conservative], *Newsweek* [liberal], *Polityka* [liberal], *W Sieci* [conservative]). The corpus of texts selected on the basis of keywords amounted to 2,906 units, which constituted the research sample. Populist strategies based on the three-element concept of Jagers and Walgrave (considering the people, criticism of the elites, and exclusion of others), alongside the local indicators of populism present in the Polish context, were found in 1,498 statements examined. The articles studied were published during the elections and post-campaign period in 2015–2017.

The database constructed in this way allowed 86 statements to be categorised as expressing Eurosceptic attitudes. These statements were further analysed in terms of several variables identified for the purpose of the study. Firstly, the types of subjects that had produced statements featuring the strategy of Euroscepticism were identified. These are listed in Figure 2.

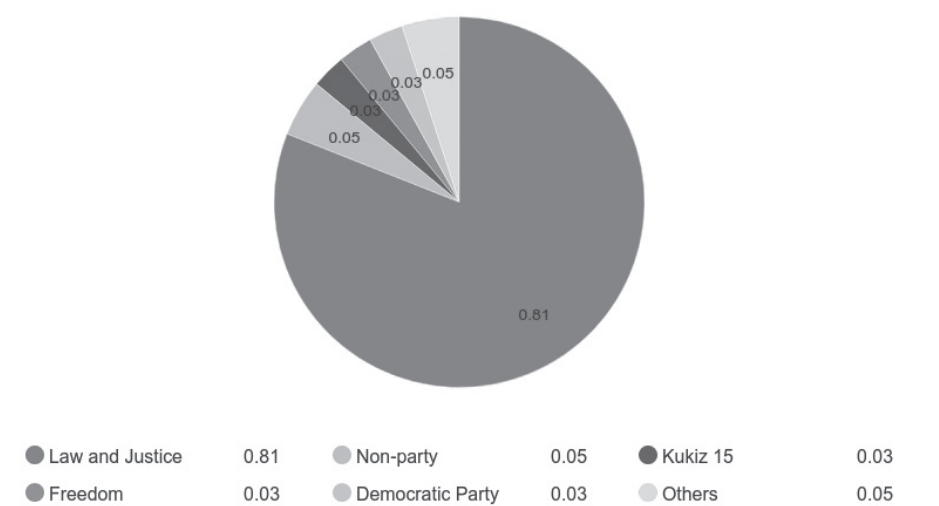*Figure 2.   Subjects employing the strategy of Eurosceptic narrative*

● Journalists	0.44	● Politicians	0.44	● Experts	0.07
● Citizens	0.02	● Others	0.02		
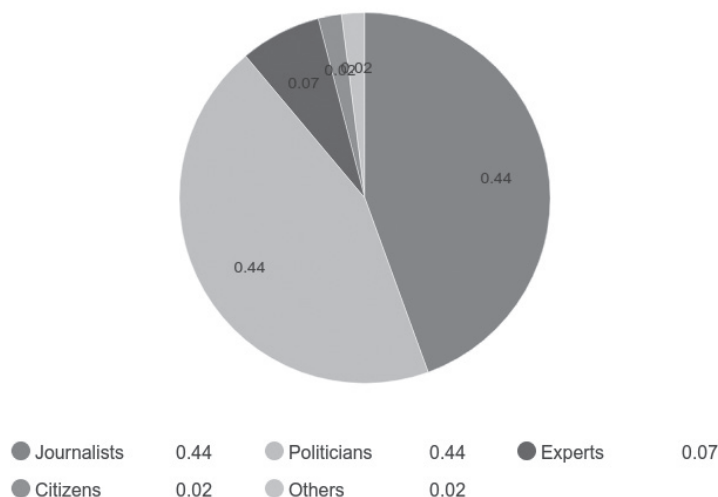
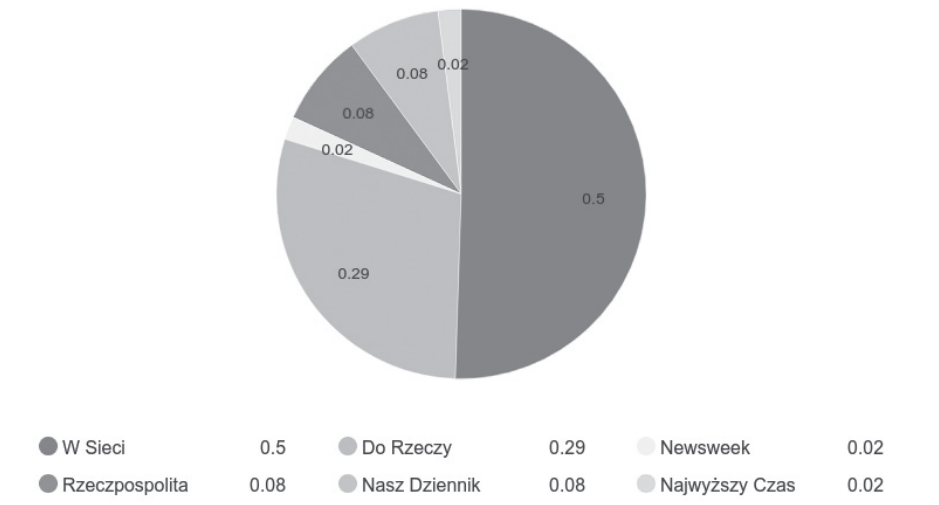*Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of the study conducted*

It can easily be seen that journalists are the main source of Eurosceptic narratives (including the authors of texts written in the first person) alongside politicians. They account for as much as 88% of all attempts identified as employing this strategy. With these two subjects in focus, an analysis of their political affiliations was conducted. The results are presented in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3.   Party affiliation of political entities voicing Eurosceptic attitudes

| ⬤ Law and Justice | 0.81 | ⬤ Non-party | 0.05 | ⬤ Kukiz 15 | 0.03 |
| ⬤ Freedom | 0.03 | ⬤ Democratic Party | 0.03 | ⬤ Others | 0.05 |

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of the study conducted

Figure 4.   Affiliation of journalists voicing Eurosceptic attitudes

| ⬤ W Sieci | 0.5 | ⬤ Do Rzeczy | 0.29 | ⬤ Newsweek | 0.02 |
| ⬤ Rzeczpospolita | 0.08 | ⬤ Nasz Dziennik | 0.08 | ⬤ Najwyższy Czas | 0.02 |

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of the study conducted.

As concerns the first category, the majority of statements examined were produced by politicians from Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS). On the one hand, this result could have been expected in view of public polls pointing to the victory of PiS in the elections (which was the case) as well as the conservative and nationalist rhetoric employed by PiS, which in Central and Eastern Europe is associated with scepticism towards supranational institutions, seen as a threat to national autonomy.

It is worth noting that the dominance of PiS over the remaining parties is quite large, in particular when compared to other entities actively endorsing Eurosceptic sentiments in their political platforms (Wolność) or in the declarations of their leaders on how they see the role of the European Union in domestic and foreign policy (Kukiz'15). On the one hand, this made the media message of PiS more pronounced than its programmatic declarations, but on the other one, since it did not correspond to the prevailing opinions about the EU among Poles, this topic was not a significant part of the electoral agenda, being secondary to such issues as the refugee crisis, among other things.
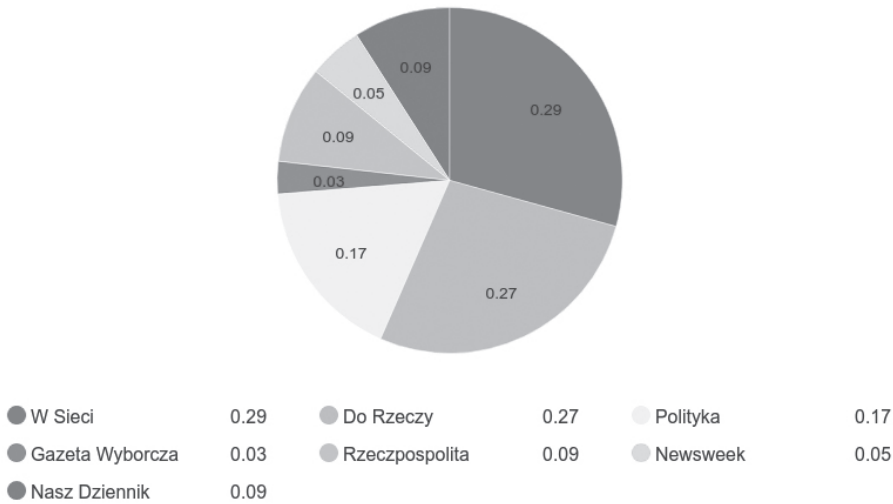
The differences in the affiliations of the authors of texts with a Eurosceptic angle are less significant but still substantial. The clear majority of Eurosceptic statements featured in the right-wing press, half of them in a single title. Interestingly, the statements published in the right-wing and conservative press account for nearly 98% of all Eurosceptic attitudes voiced by the journalists who authored the texts concerned. It is interesting to compare this data with all the statements examined in individual titles, as illustrated in Figure 5.[6]

In this case, a greater diversity of press titles containing Eurosceptic content is observed, as well as both conservative and left-liberal press in the top three. There is a tendency of the pro-European press to discuss topics and cite statements resulting from anti-European attitudes, which may mean that they were attractive and thus eagerly tackled, regardless of the ideological position of a given press title on the axes of socio-political divisions.

Somewhat different data is presented when analysing the 'saturation'—for want of a better word—of articles in individual press titles with Euroscepticism. Table 1 shows the percentage of texts in which this strategy was found in relation to all articles where one of the elements of the above-mentioned triad (anti-elitism—exclusion of others—concern for the will of the people) appeared.

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[6]   The percentage basis is all press articles in all titles featuring the populist strategy.

Figure 5.   Press titles most often featuring Eurosceptic narratives

W Sieci	0.29	Do Rzeczy	0.27	Polityka	0.17
Gazeta Wyborcza	0.03	Rzeczpospolita	0.09	Newsweek	0.05
Nasz Dziennik	0.09				

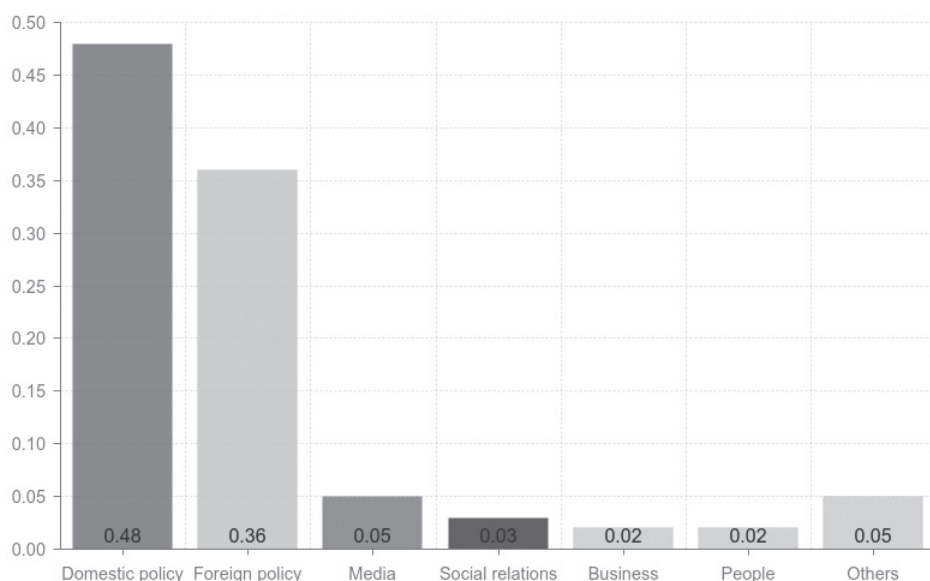*Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of the study conducted*

Table 1.   The 'saturation' of articles in individual press titles with Euroscepticism

Newspaper/ weekly	% of texts using the strategy of Euroscepticism	Number of texts using the strategy of Euroscepticism	Total number of texts with elements of populist strategies
Do Rzeczy	21%	25	119
Fakt	0%	0	96
Gazeta Wyborcza	1,5%	3	201
Nasz Dziennik	7%	8	115
Newsweek	2,3%	4	171
Polityka	2,5%	7	279
Rzeczpospolita	3,3%	6	180
W Sieci	6,5%	22	337

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of study conducted

The above figures show that the right-wing press was 'saturated' to a larger extent, and a tabloid (*Fakt*) was the least saturated. It is also interesting to correlate the strategy of Euroscepticism with the thematic areas discussed in the article analysed as a content unit. This element of the analysis is illustrated in Figure 6.

Figure 6.   Thematic areas employing the Eurosceptic narrative[7]

Due to the election and post-election period, domestic policy (where most strategies were found) and international policy were clearly essential. Interestingly, the former prevailed, which means that the (anti)European narrative was used as an argument in the struggle/competition in the area of domestic policy.

The marginal percentage of statements in the area of 'business, trade and industry' seems quite surprising, which by default could have been a natural topic of discussions on Europe understood as a political union which is nevertheless based on the strong pillars and historical foundations of an economic nature.

The situation is a little different if one examines the 'level of saturation' with Euroscepticism within the total number of articles in individual thematic areas. The number of articles was not taken into consideration here (although this number is indicated in the Table below), but it was possible to examine the specific 'potential' of the strategy concerned in relation to individual topics. Table 2 presents saturation of more than 20%.

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[7]   The percentage basis is all press articles examined. Therefore, the Table does not indicate the 'level of saturation' of individual thematic areas with the Eurosceptic narrative, showing instead a quantitative summary of individual thematic areas (each of which included a number of individual themes indicated in Fig. 7).

Table 2.   The saturation of individual thematic areas with Eurosceptic strategy

Individual topic	Thematic area	% of articles	Number of articles employing the strategy	Total number of articles in a given thematic area
Foreign trade	Business, trade and industry	100%	1	1
Monopoly	Economy	50%	1	2
Operations of international political organisations	International policy	44.3%	27	61
Declarations of assistance or cooperation	International policy	37.5%	3	8
Media regulations	Media and communication	33.3%	2	6
Statements on the direction of policies	International policy	28.6%	2	7
Diplomatic negotiations and agreements	International policy	26.5%	9	34
Wars between states	International policy	25%	1	4
International tensions and misunderstanding	International policy	24.1%	7	29
Operations of individual politicians	International policy	23.2%	16	39
Operations of political parties	International policy	21.4%	3	14
Health and social services (Other)	Health and social services	20%	1	5
Family relations	Social relations	20%	1	5

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of the study conducted

Interesting results can be found in a comparison of the individual types of Eurosceptic narrative proposed by Beneš, Chalániova and Eberle (2016), as well as Sørensen (2008) and Chalmers (2013). Their characteristics are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Types of Euroscepticism

Economic	The European Union is a tool of economic exploitation/it generates economic losses of member states.
Democratic	Its arguments are often reminiscent of the rhetorical figure of the Union suffering from a 'democratic deficit', i.e. criticism of non-transparent rules for the emergence of ruling elites, making key decisions, etc.
Independence-related	According to this type of narrative, the EU poses a threat to the sovereignty of member states, limits their decision-making capacities, and in extreme cases is compared to a 'partitioner.'
Socio-political	Argumentation focuses on the issues of social differences, political divisions and their negative consequences for the operation of member states.
Anti-systemic	This attitude largely focuses on institutional issues, where (positive) national institutions are counterpointed against (negative) European ones.
Anti-establishment	Criticism of the EU in terms of the ruling elites where economic (high salaries) or democratic (unclear selection procedure) arguments are employed.
Sectoral policy-oriented	Sceptic attitude not towards the EU as a whole, but towards its individual sectoral policies which are unfavourable for a given country, such as agricultural or trade policy, etc.

Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of Sørensen, 2008; Chalmers 2013; Beneš, Chalániová & Eberle, 2016

The individual types of Euroscepticism are identified and presented in Figure 7.

As assumed in the hypothesis, an anti-elitist Euroscepticism is the most common, followed by those related to independence and sectoral policies. On the one hand, this predictability should be associated with the political 'turn to the right' (and emphasising sovereignty, also in relation to EU institutions), but also with the emergence or strengthening of populist parties on the political market in Poland (mainly Kukiz'15 and KORWIN), which are founded on their negative attitude to the power elite, as indicated by Jagers and Walgrave (2007).

An interesting element of the analysis was the 'other' category, which was so large that it may suggest either the incorrect selection of categories at the design stage of the categorisation key, or the high specificity of the Polish discourse

in relation to the catalogues created by Western researchers or those from other Central European countries. The 'other' category was dominated by two issues. One is the negative attitude of the European Union understood as a tool of German policy. This element borders two indicators of populism identified by Paweł Przyłęcki: a negative attitude towards Germany (with a marginal share of the historical component) and political and economic sovereignty (2012) The second element was the issue of defending Polish values (Christian, conservative) in opposition to European values (liberal, progressive). This discourse typically features the criticism of enhanced integration based no longer on economic or even political community, but on 'European' values. Unlike what the Founding Fathers assumed, these values are no longer rooted in Europe's Christian foundations, but in social liberalism combined with elements of tolerance towards minorities (mainly sexual and ethnic) and the rejection of the idea of tradition, the nation and religion.

Figure 7.   Types of Euroscepticism in press coverage
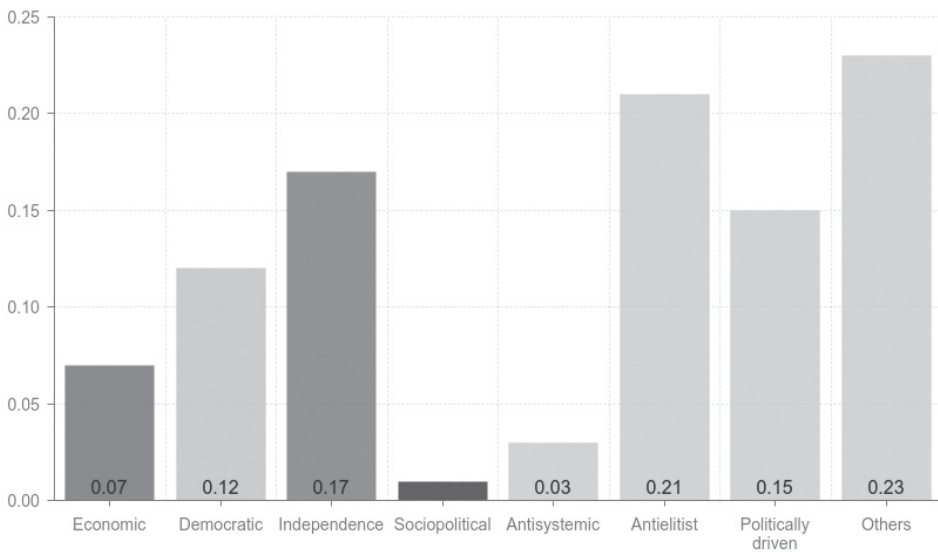
Source: Author's elaboration on the basis of the study conducted.

4.   Discussion and implications

The study was carried out to identify Euroscepticism in the Polish public debate and determine its nature. The analysis has shown that this ideological attitude/ component was not very often employed in a strategic way, given the number of statements examined in the sample tested. Nevertheless, both right-wing journalists and politicians resorted to Euroscepticism to a comparable degree, leading to the conclusion that Research Hypothesis 1 was partially confirmed, which leads to the conclusion that whereas Euroscepticism is not universal, it is politically and culturally unique in Poland.

It seems, therefore, that Euroscepticism found in the public space, mainly in the statements of politicians and journalists, has a specific character and is relatively strongly embedded in the context of national politics. It is undoubtedly related to the pan-European trends of the growing, fourth wave of populism (Stępińska *et al.*, 2017) in terms of its anti-elitist dimension directed against 'Brussels', understood as a symbol of technocratic governance, unclear procedures, high material profits, and fossilised particracy. On the other hand, the local context is manifested in a frequently present theme of deep political clefts in Poland (hence, for example, the criticism of Donald Tusk as a representative of the Brussels elite and a German supporter in the EU). The same "local flavour" is reflected both by referring to 'Polish values' (mainly understood as conservative, Christian or national values) in contrast to 'European values' (liberal, progressive, secular). Therefore, Research Hypothesis 2 may be considered partially confirmed— despite the prevailing anti-elitist themes, Eurosceptic elements are present alongside other contexts that can be identified as culturally specific to Polish politics.

At the same time, it seems that Eurosceptic themes are present in the Polish public space to a larger extent than might be suggested by the platforms of those parties which largely distance themselves from the idea of European integration, while not being openly opposed to it (see *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości*, 2014, pp. 12–13). Their statements are often unfavourable, or even hostile towards integration and the EU as such. This creates a rather peculiar communicational reality in which the programmatic attitudes declared do not match the individual views expressed (in particular in the case of politicians and political parties). This probably results from the abovementioned pro-European attitudes prevailing in Polish society, and from the individual beliefs of politicians, who are often more radical than the tenets of the political manifestos of their parties. Examining the "depth" and nature of these differences is one of the most interesting research

challenges. This may be a source of gradual changes to social attitudes, which under the influence of the Eurosceptic narrative can materialise in the form of real political change. This process, which could recently be observed in the United Kingdom, should arouse the interest of Polish researchers into the domestic currents that are emerging today and which have been presented in the conclusions to the study discussed in this article.

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