

POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AS THE OBJECT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE AND JOURNALISTIC STUDIES. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

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Summary. Political communication as the object of scholarly reflection does not have a long tradition in Poland, and it is only at present that it has appeared in educational curricula, which is demonstrated by the latest draft of educational standards in the field of journalism and social communication. This problem is the result of various determinants – historical (identification of political communication with propaganda), terminological (debates of scholars whether this subject should be affiliated with political science or media science), or cultural (changes of the quality of and participants in this process). In the contexts of the progressing significance of knowledge of the rules organizing communication in interactions between the authority and society it is necessary to distinguish political communication as a subdiscipline.

Key words: political communication, educational curriculum, subject, practice of public life

Even a cursory look at the educational offer proposed by most universities and colleges in Poland confirms the strong position of the fields of study that contain in their names at least a hint of connection with broadly conceived social communication. It is interesting that departments, chairs or institutes of journalism and social communication are generally established at faculties of political science or social sciences, although more and more often they are now set up at faculties of humanities as part of Polish studies (e.g. University of Wrocław, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin). There are then two competing educational domains that have been re-oriented towards teaching programs characteristic of philological and political science fields of study. There are clearly observable tendencies to start journalistic or communicology specializations as part of the aforementioned study programs, which is an answer to the growing interest in such studies. Because of the lack of a uniform curriculum, academic centers offer their own ‘mixes’ of subjects, which essentially reflect the research preferences of university teachers who work there. By that I mean that there are disturbed proportions between subject blocks, e.g. media science subjects and political science subjects, or more narrowly – between individual subjects, e.g. linguistics, legal subjects or those in the sphere of communication theory. A serious

barrier hampering the development of training in the field of/specialization in journalism/social communication is the insufficient number of specialist, among whom social scientists prevail. We should stress and once again accentuate the need to distinguish the discipline of media science or communicology as an autonomous unit of science systematization. This measure would first of all enhance the scientific status of research in this area, raise its standing as a significant and autonomous territory of scholarly investigation, and neutralize the accusation of the lack of a sufficient methodological base. This postulate was put forward recently, in March 2006 at the national conference 'Fifty years of research into communication and media in Poland: the present state, challenges, and prospects', organized by the Institute of Political Science Department of Social Communication and Journalism, University of Wrocław.

This general overview of the present situation of education in journalism and/or social communication shows the scale of problems facing the circles of media science specialists. On the one hand, the absence of institutional grounds for the appropriate development of the discipline, on the other – the growing demand, which sometimes forces the lowering of teaching standards, which also worries prospective and present students, and journalists themselves (this being reflected in the statements and reports by professional organizations).

It is characteristic that the representatives of various academic centers in Poland, who spoke at the Wrocław conference, while summing up the achievements of media science studies, emphasized their position in the field of science of politics. At the same time, however, they pointed out the research achievements of social communication historians, press historians, theorists of journalistic genres, and specialists in media language, communication style, copyright law, and in marketing and advertising. The impression of a lack of cohesion in the education system in Poland was intensified by the conclusions presented by Prof. Dr Barbara Pfetsch (International Political Science Association) and Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Donsbach (President, International Communication Association) concerning the development and promotion of communication science in the world as well as the directions of research into political communication within the IPSA.

The outlined determinants of education in the field of and/or specialization in journalism and/or social communication were reflected in the draft standards of the first cycle (*licencjat* or bachelor's degree) and the second cycle (master's degree) of education in the fields of political science and journalism with social communication. These drafts take into consideration, albeit to a limited extent, the suggestions proposed by communication processes theorists, thus organizing properly the educational content *inter alia* in the area of political communication.

The subject 'political communication' can be included in the group of major subjects as part of the master's degree (second-cycle) studies in political science, which definitively defines its role in profiling the political science graduate. According to the guidelines of the draft, a graduate in political science should be *inter alia* „trained to work independently for government and local government

administration, political party agencies, economic and social organizations, international institutions and organizations, and also in the media and education". The content of the subject comprises the essence, definitions, research approaches, areas of analysis, conceptions, communication models, types and forms of political communication, relations between participants in political communication, communication strategies, and professionalization of political communication. While learning this content, the student should acquire skills „in recognizing political communication processes, in analyzing the roles of participants (...), in using research tools and methods serving to build communication strategies".¹

Moreover, as part of training during the first cycle of studies in political science, the subject 'political marketing' is taught, defined by the following content: definitions and conceptions of political marketing, historical development of political marketing, the political and electoral market, political product, creating images of politicians and parties and promotion of political programs, types of campaigns in political marketing, strategic planning of campaigns, tools used in campaigns, the influence of political marketing on political culture and voter behavior, efficiency and criticism of marketing measures in present-day democracy. In the course of training the student should acquire the skills of analyzing and organizing marketing campaigns and preparing promotion strategies.

The proposed arrangement of subjects reverses the order of the contents learned: political marketing is after all an element of political communication and should be analyzed in the context of all levels of this communication. It must be noted, however, that this departure from the logic of presentation stems from the pragmatic values of knowledge of marketing techniques useful to graduates who have completed the vocationalized first cycle of higher education (in the presented outline, I am trying to restore the proper order).

The draft standards of education in the field of political science, in both cycles, do not contain other subjects that might contribute to the enhanced analysis of political communication against the background of mass, public communication, etc. while the following subjects can contribute to the desirable political science context: in the first cycle of education – parties and party systems, public administration, local government and politics, organization and management; in the second cycle – political psychology and sociology, and political decision-making.

Educational standards in the field of journalism and social communication, in the first and second cycles, do not include the subject 'political communication'. This field, however, comprises the following subjects: public relations (in the first cycle) and media economics, public opinion, marketing and advertising, and on the next level – mass communication theory, and social and cultural influence of the media (in the second cycle).

¹http://www.mnisw.gov.pl/mein/index.jsp?place=Lead07&news_cat_id=921&news_id=3539&layout=2&page=text

This organization of stages of acquiring education stems from the description of the profile of the graduate, who, having completed the first cycle of studies (vocational, *licencjat* or bachelor's degree) should be also trained to perform many professions associated with the broadly conceived field of social communication in public relations, promotion, advertising, and in institutions offering media education. Completion of the second-cycle (master's degree) studies should inter alia guarantee 'the broadening of knowledge regarding the role of the journalist as a profession of public trust'.

It should be explained at this point that institutes of journalism or faculties of political science have so far taught different subjects approximating to political communication in their content, e.g. at Warsaw University: integrated marketing communication, political journalist's techniques, public relations; in Wrocław: public opinion, marketing, PR strategies and tactics; at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, as part of specialization in political marketing: social engineering, public relations, economic foundations of the functioning of political and social organizations, marketing research, political elites, political advertising, negotiations, and political campaigns. Subjects like political marketing, advertising, or public relations are included in most study programs in different sets and conceptual packages.

Difficulties with the introduction of the subject of political communication and precise specification of its scope arise for various reasons, two of which seem essential: number one – absence of agreement about terminology among the scholars themselves, consequently, political communication is located in different contexts of the process as theory, and number two – barely a dozen-odd-year long practice of analyzing directions and levels of and participants in this process. The concept itself of communicating or communication is often used interchangeably, its referents being: transmission, understanding, influence, joining together (forming a community), interaction, exchange, a constituent of social process, which basically reflects all research interpretations: from media-centric to materialist. Tomasz Goban-Klas, who introduced many achievements in media science and communication into Polish science, emphasizes the necessity to examine all acts of social communication in the broad context of authority – society – institutions creating communications. He also suggests modifications of Harold Lasswell's theory (who speaks, what, by what medium, to whom and to what effect) by taking into account determinants resulting from the development of interactive media and from the addressee assuming the controlling role over the communication process².

According to Emil Durkheim's sociological interpretation, the use of the media has become a social fact, and their growing significance can be easily ob-

² For more on the subject, see: T. Goban-Klas, *Media i komunikowanie masowe. Teorie i analizy prasy, radia, telewizji i Internetu* (Media and mass communication. Theories and analyses of the press, radio, television, and the Internet), Warsaw – Krakow 2002, pp. 74–79.

served to a high degree during political campaigns. George Gerbner claims that what television does not show, does not exist socially. Walter Lippman asks questions concerning the persuasive efficiency of the media (they form pictures in people's heads). Haus M. Kepplinger justifies the thesis that as a result of the strengthened position of the media, politics is being dismantled, because the order of presentation of, for example, political manifestoes, creation of the image of a party or a leader, and interpretation of opinion polls determine the choices made by the public. Furthermore, journalists are blamed more and more often for lowering professional standards (partiality, receptivity to political public relations, yielding to economic pressure and internal censorship laid down by the media owners). In this context scholars present the attributes of the media as the fourth power³.

When presenting briefly the achievements of Polish political communication scholars, we should emphasize the importance of work of the team headed by Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska in Wrocław. The problems investigated cover both communication theory and marketing, political advertising, and public opinion, favorably combining a certain systemic dimension with the analysis of specific cases of the course of election campaigns, position of the leader, significance of the media, and language of communication⁴. The fundamental ones in this area are the findings obtained inter alia by Grażyna Ulicka, Marzena Cichosz, Beata Ociepka, Danuta Piontek, Barbara Sobkowiak, Robert Wiszniowski, Marek Mazur and others.

In one of the recent publications explaining the essence of political communication B. Dobek-Ostrowska rightly accentuated the consequences of the following distinction:

At present this concept (i.e. political communication – I. Hofman) is used in two senses. First, it serves to define a set scholarly theories and is treated as a field of scientific research. Second, this term is included into the world of political practice. It is used by professionals and politicians, initiating a series of communication activities, in which appropriate techniques and practices are applied. In this sense, political communication is synonymous with propaganda, political and election marketing, public relations and communication by political institutions. It is identified with strategies and ways of winning and staying in power, creating political acts and developing their career⁵.

³ E.g. T. Goban-Klas, *Cywilizacja medialna* (Media civilization), Warsaw 2005; J. Braun, *Potęga czwartej władzy* (The power of the fourth power), Warsaw 2005; K. Kowalska, *Czwarty stan – dziennikarz wobec wyzwań współczesnej sfery publicznej* (The fourth estate – the journalist in the face of challenges of the contemporary public sphere); M. Czyżewski, *Rola dziennikarza w dyskursie publicznym* (The journalist's role in public discourse) [in:] S. Mocek (ed.) *Dziennikarstwo, media, społeczeństwo* (Journalism, media, society), Warsaw 2005.

⁴ See: B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Studia z teorii komunikowania masowego* (Studies in mass communication theory), Wrocław 1999; *idem*, *Media masowe w systemach demokratycznych* (The mass media in democratic systems), Wrocław 2003; *idem*, *Kampania wyborcza: marketingowe aspekty komunikowania politycznego* (The election campaign: marketing aspects of political communication), Wrocław 2005.

⁵ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Media masowe...* (Mass media...), pp. 7–8.

This attempt to define the term more precisely shows the characteristic meeting point of communication and politics, stimulating the scholarly activity of political scientists and media studies specialists. The cited opinion of the Spanish scholar M. J. Canel on the participation of mass media in political life as an interest and pressure group, and even as a political elite, strengthens the view on the close connection between the two areas of cognition.

The earliest definition of political communication is known to come from the mid-nineteen-fifties (H. Eulau, S. J. Eldersveld, M. Janowitz, *Political Behavior*) and takes into consideration intermediation in relations between the governing institutions and voters. At present, this process is understood as the „flow of communication in both directions, embracing political elites, the media, and citizens”, effected by means of marketing techniques, opinion polls, and advertising⁶. Dann Nimmo and Keith Sanders maintain that within barely half a century an independent scientific discipline formed and they forecast its full bloom because of the so-called mediatization of politics, i.e. relationship between the functioning of politics (systems, political culture) and involvement of the media (which increases in proportion to technological progress). These problems are presented inter alia by Hans M. Kepplinger, Max Kaase, Barbara Baerns, and Paolo Mancini.

This direction was followed and thoroughly analyzed by Janina Fras in her interesting new book on political communication. To establish the place of the object of research, the reflections contained in two chapters of this publication are important. They are ‘Political Communication – A Branch of Knowledge and Language Cooperation’ and ‘Fundamentals of Typology of Political Communication Acts and Political Texts’⁷. The author maintains that we are participants in or observers of the process of integrating currents of research on communication, on account of inter alia uniform educational curricula and popularity of this field of studies. She reminds us that that the new branch – communicology, which, she suggests, should be distinguished from communication (the object of research) – draws on the experience of philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, linguists, political scientists, anthropologists, and media science

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 7.

⁷ In Chapter Two the author interprets public debate and different genres of journalistic expression: book-form interviews, A–Z lists, exposés, messages, petitions as acts of political communication. Worth noting is the proposal of defining the genre of political utterance taking into account the lasting quality of content, composition and style, the persuasive and information function, and the official situation of usage, see: J. Fras, *Komunikacja polityczna. Wybrane zagadnienia gatunków i języka wypowiedzi* (Political communication. Selected problems of the genres and language of utterances), Wrocław 2005, p. 118. The author rightly accentuates the rapid process of interpenetration of the political and journalistic reality, observable in the overuse of the adjective ‘political’ in reference to the existing journalistic genres. Moreover, she notes a certain exchange of roles between journalists specializing in political issues and politicians, press (media) commentators. *Ibidem*, p. 142. Chapter Three (the last) of the book contains discussion of Polish political metaphor.

specialists. She postulates a holistic interpretation of human communication activities because it makes us aware of the mutual connection of participants, means, codes, communications, functions, effects and enables application of uniform categorization and methodology.

When emphasizing the different standpoints in the Polish literature on the subject regarding the understanding of communication and communicology (Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska, Jersey Mikułowski-Pomorski, Maciej Mrozowski, Stefan J. Rittel), it should be pointed out that political communication as a subdiscipline of social communication emerged after 1989. Communication actions in this sphere were previously confined to propaganda and agitation, which had and still has definite consequences in the present-day research on the form and language of analogous communications. The not so remote beginnings, therefore, with the specific character of research matter (the stage of development of political parties, political culture, civic society and the stage of the independent media under democratic conditions), result in exploration of some problems typical of political communication rather than the establishment of the lasting framework of the research field. J. Fras names many examples of publications on institutional participants (the state, political parties, mass media) and on professional processes of political communication, on marketing, advertising, social engineering, organization of election campaigns, or on the language of public discourse, which supplement the area, only partially taken over by this scholarly discipline in Poland⁸.

Among the factors accentuated by J. Fras, which are conducive to the distinction of political communication as a communication subdiscipline, the important one seems to be defined as follows: „clarity, significance, independence/separate character of politics, and thereby of communication activities in politics”⁹. Pondering the significance of this argument provokes a statement anticipating the complete breaking away of the subdiscipline and its transformation into an independent discipline. This conviction is strengthened by observations of political life, including professionalization of election campaigns, and even, as some scholars believe, permanency of election struggle, fragmentation of the political scene, mediatization of politics, civic activity, interaction between the governing and the governed, and the quality of public discourse. Moreover, the knowledge of rules, principles, and patterns organizing the processes of political communication is the capital of their participants, hence the demand for specialists in e.g. political marketing and advertising. Finally, in this context, there appears the need to adjust the models of Western democracies and the results of research on the subject to the Polish realities. This means a favorable development prospect for the discipline of political communication in the academic and empirical sense.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 16–20.

⁹ The others are: research tradition and usefulness of research in communication practice, *ibidem*, p. 21.

KOMUNIKOWANIE POLITYCZNE JAKO PRZEDMIOT STUDIÓW POLITOLOGICZNYCH
I DZIENNIKARSKICH. UWAGI WSTĘPNE

Streszczenie. Komunikowanie polityczne jako przedmiot refleksji naukowej ma w Polsce niedługą tradycję, a w programach kształcenia pojawia się właściwie dopiero obecnie, o czym świadczy najnowszy projekt standardów kształcenia na kierunku dziennikarstwo i komunikacja społeczna. Problem ten wynika z rozmaitych uwarunkowań historycznych (np. utożsamianie komunikowania politycznego z propagandą), terminologicznych (dyskusje badaczy wokół afiliowania przedmiotu przy politologii lub medioznawstwie), kulturowych (zmiana jakości i uczestników tego procesu). W kontekście postępującego znaczenia znajomości reguł porządkujących komunikowanie w interakcjach: władza – społeczeństwo istnieje potrzeba wyodrębnienia komunikowania politycznego jako subdyscypliny.

Słowa kluczowe: komunikowanie polityczne, program kształcenia, przedmiot, praktyka życia publicznego