

# Rhetoric in Scandinavia

## Retoryka w Skandynawii

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### VARIA

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### Two crises – framing messages about the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border Dwa kryzysy – o ramowaniu przekazów o kryzysie na granicy polsko-białoruskiej

#### Abstract

The article aims to analyse the media framework constituting a rhetorical strategy in presenting the subject of refugees on the Polish-Belarusian border in August and September 2021, considering the polarisation phenomenon. The analysis results show that the topic was only a pretext to consolidate the existing ideological divisions. The materials, which should have been credible, unambiguous and reliably prepared in the news, in fact achieved the assumed goals of polarising the public, enhancing divisions and strengthening hostile attitudes towards people with opposite views (*echo chambers*).

Celem artykułu jest analiza ram medialnych stanowiących strategię retoryczną w przedstawianiu tematyki uchodźców na granicy polsko-białoruskiej w sierpniu i wrześniu 2021 roku. Ponadto w artykule omawia się zjawisko polaryzacji. Wyniki analizy wskazują, że temat ten był tylko pretekstem do utrwalenia istniejących podziałów światopoglądowych. Materiały, które w serwisie informacyjnym powinny być wiarygodne, jednoznaczne i rzetelnie przygotowane, realizowały założone cele, utrwalając podziały i umacniając wrogie nastawienie wobec osób o przeciwnych poglądach (*echo chambers*).

#### Key words

framing, polarisation, crisis, migrants, newscast  
ramowanie, polaryzacja, kryzys, migranci, serwis informacyjny

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## **Two crises – framing messages about the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border**

### **1. Introduction**

In December 2000, the UN General Assembly designated 20 June as World Refugee Day. Government websites published (publicly available) information that “Physicist Albert Einstein, US Secretary of State Madeline Albright and singer MIA gained fame in different fields, but they had at least one thing in common: they were all refugees.” Furthermore, “Helping refugees is not merely an expression of solidarity and moral responsibility. It is also an investment in another person. And also in our own economy, culture and science” (Kugiel 2020). This motivating statement is even more profound today with the war going on in neighbouring Ukraine. Poles, in a rush of heart, but, as it can be said today, also in consistent action, have been helping refugees fleeing the Russians’ attacks. However, it seems that such statements do not have a direct impact on the discourse on migrants in the Polish political space, and therefore in the media. As a result of strong political polarisation, the Polish society became divided regarding immigrants, especially those coming from distant, culturally different countries. The media, divided into those supporting the government and those that are extremely critical of it, also use the issue of immigrants for purposes other than reporting on the migration crisis.

The article aims to analyse the framing of messages about migrants who tried to cross the Polish-Belarusian border in August 2021. The television newscasts of the two largest Polish broadcasters were monitored: “Wiadomości” on TVP1 and “Fakty” on TVN. It has been assumed that due to the media polarisation in Poland, the above broadcasters present a different, often opposing viewpoint. The selected subject clearly shows this duality of content and tone of the message. The following research questions were posed:

1. What topics dominate in informational journalistic materials about the refugees on the Polish-Belarusian border?

2. How do these two media outlets show refugees? What image is reproduced? What characteristics are attributed to the refugees?
3. What interpretative framework do the two broadcasters use, and how does that affect the structure of journalistic messages?

The choice of the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border was based on three premises. First, the year 2015, when all of Europe was struggling with the influx of migrants, was the greatest crisis in which many European states and representatives of specific European Union institutional structures were involved. Secondly, activities related to the influx of refugees and migrants were named a *hybrid war* in the social and media discourse. That suggests strong political tensions and, consequently, a profound interest from the media and society. Finally, it was the last such crisis before the war in Ukraine. The conflict somehow changed the negative perception of a refugee to that closer to “a neighbour in need of help”, putting aside the image of a migrant who comes from a distant country, often has a distinct skin colour and originates from a religiously and culturally distant country.

## 2. Media polarisation in Poland

The political, ideological and media polarisation phenomenon is a significant premise affecting the choice of the analysed content. This triad is based on the observation that the political and media systems are the essential components of social structure. Both are strongly associated and mutually influencing, impacting the ideological structure of society (see Oniszczyk 2011; Olender 2021). The polarisation issue in the indicated areas is nothing new. However, it should be emphasised that it is now transiting from a low to a high degree, and noted that the whole process has become self-reinforcing (Pierson and Schickler 2020, 38–39).

The concept of polarisation in the worldview or ideological area is understood as bipolarity, divergence, and opposing value systems. The phenomenon

covers essential areas of social life: the political system, family life patterns, moral issues and religious practices. We assume that polarisation is a process where differences between people and the accompanying conflicts consolidate, acquire symbolic meaning and eventually gain the status of antagonistic criteria for identifying collective identity (Ruszkowski, Przystalski, and Maranowski 2020, 6).

This bipolarity is vigorously implemented in the political sphere and not only in Poland (see Kubin and von Sikorski 2021). The experience of parliamentary elections in recent years in many European states and the United States of America

prompts research on the bipolarity impact on democracy development or, contrary, its crisis<sup>1</sup>.

The concept of polarisation is most often applied to political and ideological divisions. However, it should be highlighted that the former is a process in which society is divided into two groups with different political views. The latter is a measure of the ideological distance between the indicated groups (Neudert and Marchal 2019, 11). In both areas, the media are a source of knowledge and shape opinion, and thus reinforce the polarisation phenomenon. Simultaneously, one of the pivotal and visible effects of political polarisation is the collapse of the role of the media. The intense polarisation of the Polish media is evident, and thus the bias of the messages of the leading broadcasters (Horonziak 2022, 216-220; Bartoszewicz and Gołębiowski 2021, 76-77). The referred observations and theoretical assumptions led to the initial assumption regarding the polarisation of the media and directly influenced the selection of broadcasters whose messages were quantitatively and qualitatively analysed.

### 3. Message framing as a rhetorical journalistic strategy

Framing in media studies includes the process of creating a journalistic message in such a way as to clearly communicate a fact or event by promoting a specific (selected) interpretation, moral assessment and presentation of facts through the selection of certain aspects of reality only (Entman 1993, 5). This is a highly persuasive procedure, as it refers to memory patterns (*frames*). It also defines a framework that, based on experience, allows for efficient collection, selection and processing of data and relating them to mental templates that facilitate the understanding and interpretation of information (Goffman 1974, 13; Gamson and Modigliani 1989, 3; Pan and Kosicki 1993, 57; Bieniek 2020, 156). The frame can be characterised as an interpretive scheme in the media message, which affects remembering, understanding, evaluating, attitude and behaviour towards the received message. The process of media framing begins with the conscious or unconscious construction of a journalistic statement in such a way that it carries the content chosen by the broadcaster as vital for their interest and assumed goal. The deliberate highlighting of selected features makes the message interpreted and classified per the broadcaster's assumption, which emphasises selected aspects while minimising others. Therefore, the presented content gains the meaning imposed by the message's author (Amores and Arcila 2019, 2; Pluwak 2009, 49;

1. Some previous analyses point to the strengthening of democracy through polarisation. However, a growing body of contemporary research shows that the increasing political polarisation and the related *echo chamber* phenomenon increasingly restrict democracy, leading to the centralisation of power. See: Kubin and von Sikorski 2021; Lee 2015; Bail et al. 2018.

Palczewski 2011, 31–33; Chyliński 2013, 84; Maćkiewicz 2020, 621–622). However, as Krzysztof Wasilewski (2019, 96–97) points out, this action may also result from the media and journalists' functioning in a specific social reality and the media system of a given country, in which the broadcaster's chosen behaviour and the resulting message structure are "a resultant, even subconscious, of the professed system of values, ideology or political sympathies." Framing is also treated as a rhetorical strategy (Miłkowska-Samul 2018; Hänggli and Kriesi 2010), which refers indirectly to *logos* but directly to *ethos* and *pathos*.

At this point, the relationship between political polarisation and message framing is worth noting. Analysis of both phenomena undoubtedly shows that the advancing ideological and political divisions force radicalisation and, simultaneously, unification of messages addressed to specific recipient groups. One of the methods of reaching and affecting these social groups is framing. Politicians choose topics or describe issues within the media discourse in such a way as to build and cement a community around politically planned content, postulates and often also ideology (Olender 2021, 93). It seems vital that the differences do not always originate from political or ideological beliefs and preferences but from the very manner and place of communicating actions (cf. Banks et al. 2020).

The re-framing phenomenon is also worth noting as it shows the high dynamics of changes in message structuring. Re-framing focuses on formulating the message to present the issue per the values and beliefs of the addressee group or responding to their problems. For example, in the case of the migration crisis, it is not presented as a refugee emergency but, for example, as a security crisis (Almustafa 2022, 1077). Matthew Feinberg and Robb Willer (2019) write about re-framing in relation to moral values. They claim that this activity in the political sphere is related to polarisation by contributing to its aggravation. When formulating messages supporting a stance their recipients would certainly not support, politicians use such arguments, refer to such values, and use appropriate metaphors and idioms that are convergent with the addressees' moral values and often evoke strong emotional reactions in them. Such message tailoring to a specific audience is convincing as it gives the impression that the content received is in line with the recipients' deeply rooted moral beliefs, making the promoted content morally acceptable and even desirable.

#### **4. The subject matter of migrants in the Polish political and social space**

The migration crisis has been present in the media discourse as its permanent element since 2015. It was then that the migration of refugees from the Middle East and Africa to Europe increased, mainly from Syria (33%), Afghanistan (15%)

and Iraq (6%). The total number of registered illegal border crossings in the European Union amounted to 1,822,337<sup>2</sup> (Frontex 2016, 16). The influx of people was so overwhelming and, at the same time, risking the lives, in particular of children, that it became part of the European Union policy. The European Council and the European Parliament issued a joint resolution in which both institutions “confirmed their consensus for rapid action to save lives and to step up EU action” (*Communication from the Commission...* 2015, 4). Furthermore, both initiated activities to distribute refugees among member states. The policy revealed heterogeneous and often highly divergent positions of European states. The actions coincided with the change of the majority party in the Polish parliament, which tightened the Polish state’s anti-immigration policy. The issue of migrants has become an instrumental tool for convincing citizens that both refugees and the European Union, as the institution imposing the obligation to accept them, pose a threat to the security and integrity of the Polish state. This narrative was used in key moments of political struggles, in particular during election campaigns. The issue resurfaced in 2021 when immigrants attempted to enter the European Union through Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia after passing through Belarus. This situation looked different than the one described earlier and was referred to as a hybrid war.

Hybrid warfare is an ambiguous term (Johnson 2018; Puyvelde 2015) that appeared in the general political debate in Europe after Russia’s invasion of Crimea in 2014. The concept is characterised as “a combination of conventional and unconventional strategies, methods and tactics in modern warfare, as well as psychological or informational aspects of conflict operations” (Bilal 2021). It is balancing between the state of peace and the state of war, so a conflict that happens below the threshold of war and takes “a creeping form, stretched over time, characterised by constant public fear of the outbreak of a ‘full-size conflict’” (Ochmann and Wojas 2018, 287).

The genesis of the Polish-Belarusian border crisis lies in the economic sanctions imposed by the European Union on Belarus in June 2021 (Olbrycht 2022; Filipec 2022). They were a consequence of arresting the Belarusian oppositionist Roman Protasevich. In response to the sanctions, the Belarusian authorities allowed and even supported a massive and uncontrolled influx of migrants from the Middle East, mainly from Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syria (Olbrycht 2022). The operation consisted in convincing people willing to migrate that the road first through Lithuania (which initially was the leading transit country) and then through Poland was easy and safe and led to Germany and other European countries. A critical

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2. 31% of the refugees were of an unknown origin.

incident that made the border events a permanent element of the media discourse is the “imprisonment” of a migrants’ group on the Polish-Belarusian border in Usnarz Górny. Men, women and children were surrounded on both sides by the border guards of both states and put in a no-win situation - with no possibility of returning to Belarus and entering Poland. The situation at the border made the Polish government take a series of actions. They included the bringing in soldiers and the Territorial Defence Forces, introducing a state of emergency by the Polish President in part of the Podlaskie Region and part of the Lubelskie Region (which prevented access to the border zone for the media, medical assistance and ordinary citizens). Additionally, the *Act on Building State Border Safeguard* (Journal of Laws 2021, item 1992) was adopted, and the *Act on Foreigners* (Journal of Laws 2021, item 1918) was amended by tightening the penalty for an undocumented crossing of the EU external border (Olbrycht 2022, 147).

## 5. Methodology

Researchers from different countries use framing as a method to analyse journalistic messages about refugees (Bauer et al. 2021; Parrott et al. 2019; Ramasubramanian and Miles 2018; Liu 2022; Heidenreich et al. 2019). Since the issue of migrants has been an essential part of European political discourse in recent years, frequently included in election campaigns, it requires observation and analysis to show the dynamics of change, re-framing and the resulting polarisation. Therefore, the classical notion of framing seems appropriate for the present considerations. Therefore, the current analysis has adopted the classical understanding of framing, which Robert M. Entman (1993, 52) characterised as selection and salience. According to Entman, to frame is to select some aspects of perceived reality to make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.

An inductive approach was used in the conducted analysis, consisting in “comparing the attributes of individual messages to determine the news’ common features” (Palczewski 2011, 33), together with generic frames. The analysis concerns a sensitive topic that is highly engaging ideologically. That affects the structure and content of messages through the involvement of the sender and the recipient, referring to (often) unconscious beliefs regarding the discussed issue. That may suggest the necessity to use issue-specific frames. They are designed to research unconscious convictions which affect the message structuring. However, the risk involved in using these frames determined the choice of the generic frames. As Claes de Vreese (2005, 55) rightly points out, using the issue-specific frame in

the research process leads to generalisation, comparison and building new theories (new framework) for each research on sensitive topics.

The framework scope has been limited to the set proposed by Seon-Kyoung An and Karla K. Gower (2009) due to a review of research on framing crisis communication. The argument supporting the choice is the use of the terms migration crisis, refugee crisis and hybrid war (which is characterised as a crisis) in the description of the analysed situation. The highlighted framework is not a list of new (different) frameworks other than those present in the earlier literature on the subject but a distinction of those most often present in crisis messages. The analysis refers to the multimodal framework due to the multi-sensory nature of the television message, which is constructed using various semiotic tools (Alonso-Belmonte and Porto 2020, 55–56; Maćkiewicz 2021, 11; Żebrowska 2014, 10). The analysed materials come from two television newscasts – “Wiadomości” on TVP and “Fakty” on TVN. As mentioned earlier, this choice is based on the Polish media polarisation thesis and the resulting ideological and political division observable in the newscasts of the public broadcaster and the selected commercial broadcaster, as many researchers previously remarked (Horonziak 2022; Klepka 2019; Kopeć-Ziemczyk 2020, Nożewski 2021).

The study is based on media content analysis. The analysed unit is journalistic material, which consists of the announcement by the news anchor, the news strips (if any) and the journalistic message in the form of film material following the announcement. The general context of the publication of materials on the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border from 17 August to 1 September 2021 will be discussed. The indicated time period begins on the first day when journalistic material regarding the migration crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border appeared in the observed television news services. The last day of the analysis is also the last day of media access to the area near the border. A state of emergency was in force on September 2, under which journalists were not allowed to enter the border areas. Detailed analysis is based on the framing theory by Entman, Gamson and Modigliani, Tankard (after Palczewski 2011) and reconnaissance by Jolanta Maćkiewicz (2021).

## 6. Media content analysis

The topic of refugees on the Polish-Belarusian border in TV news was presented in TVP’s “Wiadomości” on August 17, 2021 as the seventh journalistic material and on August 18, 2021 in TVN’s “Fakty” as the first news. These dates are, therefore, the beginning of the observation, which ended on September 1, 2021. From September 2, a state of emergency came into effect, which prevented media access

to the border area where the refugees were staying, thus terminating reporting from where the migrants were staying. At that time, “Wiadomości” published 24 journalistic materials, and “Fakty” – 23. The total duration of broadcasts devoted to the analysed matter is 97 minutes and 06 seconds on TVP and 65 minutes and 16 seconds on TVN. Table 1 contains detailed data (Table 1).

	TVP1 “Wiadomości”	TVN “Fakty”
Number of materials	24	23
Total time	97 minutes 06 seconds	65 minutes 16 seconds
The first material in the news	5	9
The second material in the news	5	9
The longest material	6 minutes 31 seconds	3 minutes 23 seconds
The shortest material	2 minutes 12 seconds	1 minute 35 seconds

**Table 1.** Broadcasts: general information. Source: own study.

The quantitative data show that the subject was discussed in “Wiadomości” for much longer, although the number of journalistic materials was comparable. TVP devoted almost 50% more time to the refugees on the Polish-Belarusian border than TVN, whose materials were obviously shorter. At the same time, “Fakty” presented the topic of migrants mainly as the first or second material in the news (18 materials out of 23 broadcasts). In “Wiadomości”, the subject made the first two news ten times out of 24 published journalistic messages, so for the most part, it was presented as the third or later news. In four editions of the TVP news, the subject of refugees was discussed in two independent journalistic materials and, in two cases, in three news items. TVN discussed the situation on the border twice in six editions and three times once. Each TVP news had a title presented in the strip during the anchor’s announcement, and on TVN, such titles appeared six times.

The time and quantity distribution show that, on the one hand, “Wiadomości” talked longer about the border situation, but at the same time, it put this topic in the first place less frequently, thus reducing its importance. In four cases, the main issue to which the “Wiadomości” journalistic material about refugees referred was the TVN station and its reporting on the crisis. “Fakty”, on the other hand, in the initial period of reporting on the topic (August 19 and 20), placed information about the TVN24 jubilee concert as a more prominent topic twice.

Referring to the previously indicated literature, the analysis of the journalistic messages’ content on television news was divided into the following stages:

1. Defining the problem:
  - a) extracting designation words defining the main problem, protagonists and antagonists;
  - b) extracting metaphorical or stereotypical connotations;
  - c) identifying and naming the leading actors;
  - d) defining the referent image (the way refugees and the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border are presented<sup>3</sup>).
2. Cause and effect interpretation:
  - a) indication of reasons;
  - b) indication of effects;
  - c) indication of responsible persons;
  - d) identifying positive characters.
3. Determining the media framework from the following (An and Gower 2009, 108):
  - a) accountability framework;
  - b) economic framework;
  - c) conflict framework;
  - d) 'human interest' framework;
  - e) morality framework.

### 6.1. Defining the problem

Designatum words were extracted by registering repetitive terms concerning migrants, the border situation and the people involved. These were always words appearing (and repeated several times) in the messages, not a term given by the researcher. On TVP, the dominant terms were “attack”, reproduced in nine journalistic materials (38%), “crisis” in eight messages (33%), and hybrid war or attack – seven statements (30%). Notably, the illegality of migrants’ activities was emphasised. The strips that were part of the announcement of the journalistic material were dominated by an emphasis on the word “border” in the context of ensuring Poland’s security, but more importantly – the security of the European Union. This theme appeared as the news headline. “Fakty” used utterly different terms to describe the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border. It spoke mainly using the term “help” (39% of journalistic materials) in the context of the need to provide it and the lack of aid from the Polish side. Other accompanying terms included “diseases”, “drama”, “chaos”, and “lack of food and drink”. On August 28, the narrative changed, and the news started to talk more about the

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3. It should be emphasised that from the very beginning of the crisis, access to the border and refugees was difficult due to the border guards, and later also other uniformed services that cordoned the border area. Therefore, the situation was pictured in general or full plan. For this reason, the framing method is not subject to separate analysis.

state of emergency, providing numbers on illegal border crossings to Poland, Lithuania and Latvia. In “Fakty”, the stripes appeared six times, and here, too, the word “border” was present in half of them but in combination with the words “stalemate”, “drama”, and “soullessness”, which emphasises the emotional nature of the statement visible in the designatum words.

The same nature of journalistic materials is seen in the metaphors or stereotypes used to describe the situation at the border. Verbal and non-verbal phrases and images referring to stereotypes were mainly used by TVP. Not every journalistic material included such phrases and images. However, once they appeared, they mainly referred to building a sense of threat. Initially, “Wiadomości” was based on the image of young men, emphasising the lack of women and children. Subsequently, the threats of accepting migrants to Poland were shown, followed by messages quoting the statements of citizens of European countries that accepted refugees in 2015, who emphasised the increase in crime on the part of migrants. Finally, the same narrative was translated into the Polish situation using the figure of a migrant – a man – a potential criminal, building a sense of threat in connection with accepting immigrants. File images from Auschwitz showing SS soldiers and prisoners were also used to emphasise how badly the opposition was acting, whose representatives compared the Polish uniformed services on the border to those troops. It was also characteristic that “Wiadomości” repeated the same images and statements about the opposition in different contexts.

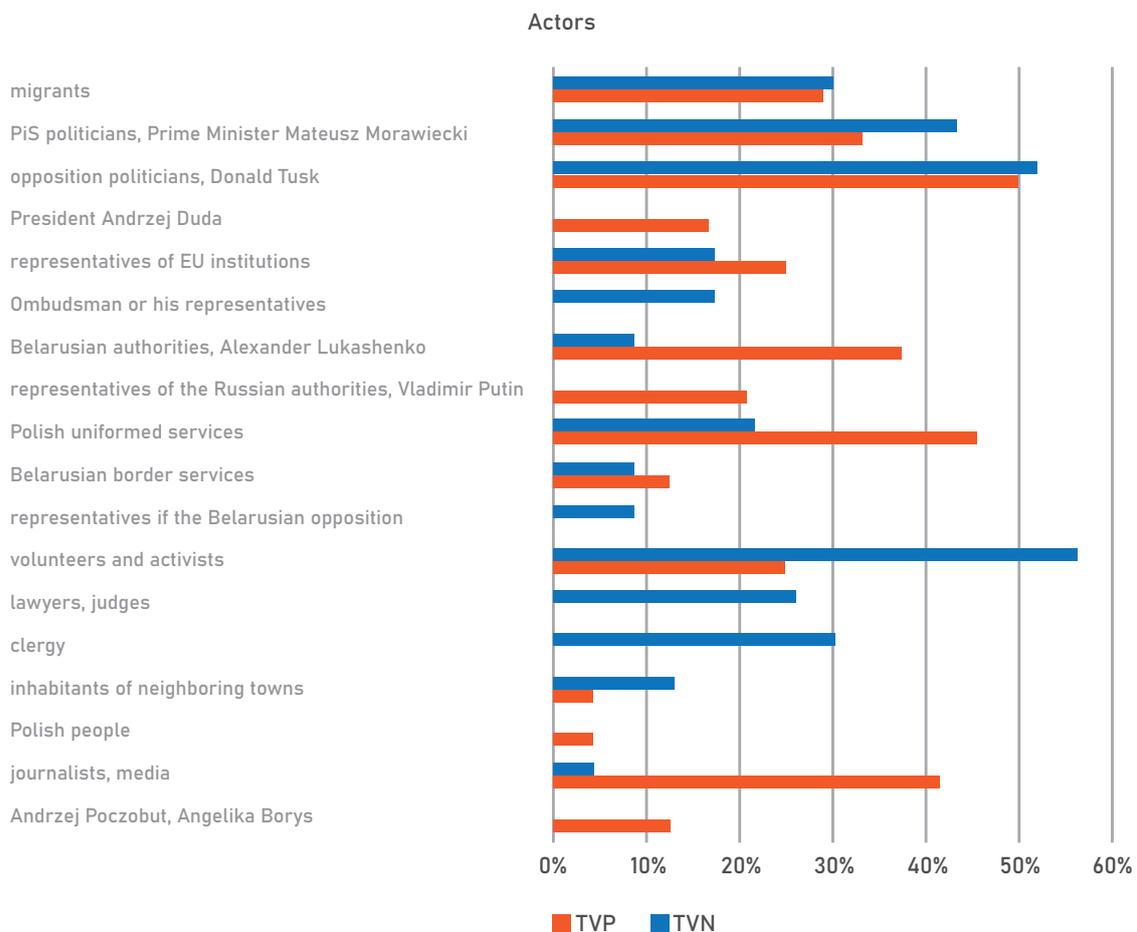
The actors present in both broadcasters’ messages were broadly similar. Eighteen categories of actors were distinguished based on journalistic material. However, that is a certain simplification. For example, opposition politicians and Donald Tusk (who was distinguished as the leader of the Civic Platform, the main opposition party, and the person treated as a strong opponent of the governing party but also as the President of the European Commission during the 2015 migration crisis) were grouped in one category. Thus, materials, which presented opposition politicians and Donald Tusk himself, were counted as a single journalist message for statistical analysis. Breaking down into specific names, even if they are repeated in several messages, would result in several dozen categories. That, however, would distort the readability of the message. Finally, it should be noted that an actor is a person (or persons) who appeared in the material as an active subject to whom the journalist referred in their statement. Thus, showing, for example, a politician without a specific goal discussed in the journalistic material did not mean that they were treated as an “actor” in the analysis.

Migrants, as active actors of messages devoted to them, appeared on both news in seven journalistic messages, which constituted 29% of the news in “Wiadomości” and 30% in “Fakty”. Although they were the leading topic and

the information referred to them in the context of the migration crisis, they were not the subjects of journalists' statements in most cases (Chart 1). When TVP discussed the border crisis, the topic most often concerned the opposition (50%), Polish uniformed services present at the border (46%) and journalists and the media (42%). Regarding designatum words and stripes, the opposition was presented in the context of harming the Polish cause, actions in line with the goals of the Lukashenko regime, and attacks on Polish uniformed services. The latter topic was present in almost half of the analysed materials. On the one hand, it emphasised the defence of Poland's borders by the Border Guard, Polish army, territorial defence forces and police, and on the other hand, it showed how the opposition and its supporting activists attacked these services. Five messages used the same fragment of Władysław Frasyniuk's conversation, who said in "Fakty po Faktach" about soldiers "Well, that's not what soldiers do, they're just garbage. These are not human behaviours"<sup>4</sup>. TVP repeatedly broadcast the "just garbage" fragment emphasising the reprehensibility of the term and publishing statements by politicians, public figures and average Poles criticising the statement. Notably, in the first days after Frasyniuk's interview was broadcast, the same fragment of the conversation was repeated several times in a single issue of "Wiadomości". The quoted statement fragment was also used to criticise TVN, the broadcaster of the "Fakty po Faktach", and the interviewing journalist. In addition to TVN journalists, TVP journalists and German media also performed as actors on "Wiadomości". Prominent actors in the TVP news were also Alexander Lukashenka and the Belarusian regime (38%) and Vladimir Putin (21%), who was not present on the TVN news. It shows that the audience's attention was directed to the two dictators, pointing to the main ones responsible for the situation on the border. That was also supposed to justify the Polish government's inactivity towards the newcomers as not giving in to the pressure and actions of Belarus and Russia. The politicians of the ruling Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) and the Polish government (33%) were portrayed as border security guardians. The frequency distribution of individual actors in selected cases was similar to "Fakty", but the context was utterly different. Migrants were presented first and foremost as sick and in need of help. It was emphasised that they were specific individuals, known by name, of professions cited by journalists. Most often, however, the border crisis was presented in the context of volunteers and activists (57%). They were interpreters

4. "Fakty po Faktach" TVN24 of August 22, 2021. This statement in its full wording brought charges by the public prosecutor's office. In the judgement issued on August 4, 2022, the court stated that the terms "a crowd of cowards", "a pack of dogs that surrounded poor, weak people", "are anti-Polish behaviours, these soldiers do not serve the Polish state", which Frasyniuk used when evaluating the soldiers actions on the border fall under the right to criticism. On the other hand, the term "garbage" was offensive, humiliating and contemptuous, thus insulting soldiers, but the degree of social harmfulness of the act was not significant. The fine was PLN 3,000 for the Victims' Assistance and Post-penitentiary Assistance Fund. Both the public prosecutor and Władysław Frasyniuk declared that they would appeal. All the translations – by the author.

and translators, medics, foundation members, protesters at the border and in Warsaw, etc. They talked about the refugees' situation, difficulties or impossibility of providing help and treatment by uniformed services. The same type of actors also appeared on TVP (25%), but their image was thoroughly opposite. They were mainly protesters who insulted the uniformed services, destroyed the fence at the border and hindered the soldiers' operations on the border. In Fakty news, activists were often accompanied by lawyers (26%) and clergy of various denominations (30%), portraying the crisis from different perspectives. Interestingly, TVP, which had repeatedly published reports on religious events, did not show the clergy as actors involved in the crisis. TVN, on the other hand, used this theme to emphasise the need to help migrants. Opposition politicians (52%) presented in "Fakty" naturally criticised the government's actions and the statements by PiS politicians, often placing them in the context of the inhumane treatment of refugees at the border.



**Chart 1.** Actors present in the materials of TVP's "Wiadomości" and TVN's "Fakty". Source: own study.

The designatum image, in relation to the analysis' main objective, was defined

as an image referring directly to migrants and the situation on the border. Thus, pictures of, for example, protests in Warsaw, politicians or places unrelated to the border were neglected. TVP's multi-threaded journalistic materials made it sometimes difficult to define a designatum image that would describe the situation on the border. Alternatively, migrants and the border did not appear as part of the journalistic material at all. In both news programmes, the most recurrent image was the border camp in Usnierz Górny, with both TV stations using different elements of this image. TVP started by showing men exclusively. TVN, from the beginning, emphasised the presence of women while only talking about children (a crying baby heard at night). After the border guards cut off access to migrants, with subsequent support from other uniformed services, TVP showed the camp from a distance. However, the migrants were still visible, sometimes with Belarusian services delivering hot meals. TVN focused on showing the cordons of the police and other uniformed services separating migrants from contact with volunteers and cameras and vehicles whose working engines and emergency sirens prevented contact with the interpreter. The message accentuated the distance, masking (anonymity), and the hostile attitude of uniformed officers, e.g. repelling the station journalist. TVP's "Wiadomości" also repeatedly used images from the 2015 migration crisis. They showed masses arriving in Europe, overcrowded boats, men forcing their way through the police cordons, and riots caused by refugees. Attention should also be drawn to film images from Auschwitz used twice to illustrate the topic. The image frequently reproduced by both broadcasters was the border with the barbed wire fence built on it.

## 6.2. Cause and effect interpretation

The stage of cause and effect interpretation was challenging to implement. Both newscasts' materials lacked an analysis of the causes and effects of the situation on the Polish-Belarusian border. Journalists in "Wiadomości" and "Fakty" mentioned individual materials in retaliation against the Belarusian opposition, sanctions imposed by the EU on Belarus, and the use of migrants to destabilise the situation on the European Union border. However, these were not in-depth analyses, and the presented news did not intend to discuss the causes and effects. Alexander Lukashenko (Belarusian regime) was named as the responsible person, and TVP did it in 42% of the broadcasts, while TVN in 22%. "Wiadomości" also blamed the border crisis on the opposition and TVN. "Fakty" did not mention anyone as a hero of the events, while TVP unambiguously indicated one (38%), namely the uniformed services that defended the security of Poland and European Union borders.

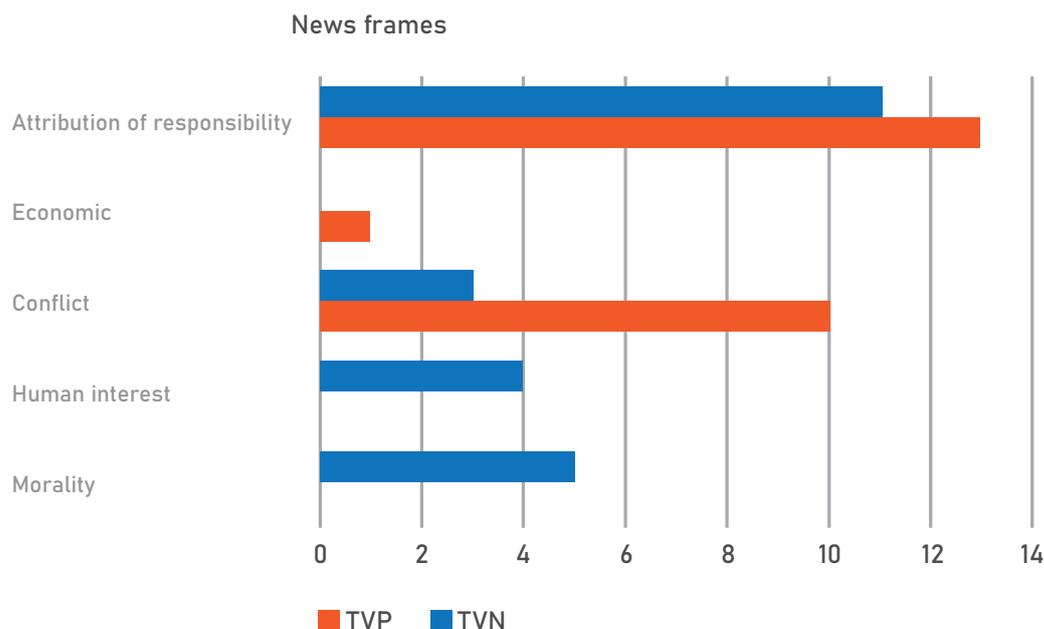
### 6.3. Media framework

By selecting actors, words, and designatum images, the broadcaster presented the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border from a specific, selected perspective. Referring to the previously presented Entman's definition, both newscasts presented the topic through selected issues and actors, promoting a specific definition of the problem, and thus the interpretation of events chosen by the broadcaster, as well as specific moral assessment. When analysing journalistic materials, each was assigned one dominant media framework out of the following five:

1. attribution of responsibility framework – assigning responsibility for cause and effect, course, actions taken or lack thereof to the government (politicians), selected groups and specific persons;
2. economic framework – define the crisis through the prism of economic effects to be borne by the state, organisations or groups, but also by individuals;
3. conflict framework – the crisis is presented as a lack of agreement and understanding between its participants/parties; in the analysed situation, the parties to the conflict were Poland or the European Union vs. Belarus, or the Polish government vs. political opposition (TVP), and uniformed services vs. activists and volunteers (TVN);
4. human interest framework – showing the crisis from the ordinary people's perspective and the accompanying emotions and the harm suffered;
5. morality framework – placing a crisis in the context of ethics, orders and social rules, and also about spirituality/religiosity.

The crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border was presented by both newscasts mainly by selecting the accountability framework (Chart 2). Responsibility referred to two situations: firstly, bringing refugees to the border with Poland, and secondly, the situation of migrants camped on the border. In the first case, both news programmes unanimously named Alexander Lukashenko as the accountable person. He was emphasised as the one who allowed migrants to arrive in Belarus and directed them further to the border using relevant services. The dictator's statements were quoted, such as "We used to stop drugs and migrants – now you will have to catch them yourselves", presented within the journalistic material of "Fakty" on August 26, 2021, and other public declarations by Lukashenko, proving the deliberate actions of the President of Belarus. The broadcasters focused on showing that the Belarusian regime and services, which offer migrants an easy way to get to the European Union, were responsible for the challenging border situation. They showed video footage proving the planned actions of the Belarusian

authorities, which organised migrants' transport to the border with Poland, Lithuania and Latvia (Operation "Airlock"). A clear difference appears in the responsibility for the migrants' situation at the border, mainly in Usnarz Górny. Just as in the first case the responsibility lies with a specific individual, in the second case it is treated as collective and systemic. "Wiadomości" emphasised that the refugees were on the Belarusian side and the Polish party was not responsible for that. The Border Guard's spokeswoman frequently emphasised in journalists' reports that no one from the Polish side can approach the refugees as that would make crossing the border with Belarus illegal, which may cause a reaction from the local Border Guard. The Border Guard's official position was based on the claim that the Polish officers protect people trying to approach migrants against an unforeseen reaction from the Belarusian services. That stance was complemented by the multiply repeated information that the Polish government organised humanitarian aid, which was dispatched by truck to Belarus. That way, the Polish party relieved itself of responsibility for its failure to provide assistance to the migrants. "Fakty" blamed the migrants' nightmarish situation on the Polish government, which did not assist directly and hindered volunteers and activists in delivering such aid. Acute weather conditions and refugees' health problems were repeatedly emphasised, showing that the government's closure of access to migrants makes the Polish authorities responsible for the inhumane treatment of newcomers. According to TVN, the fault was also indirectly borne by the uniformed services, which tightly cordoned off the refugees and used patrol vehicles whose operating engines and sirens drowned out possible long-distance contact.



**Chart 2.** Media framework used in TVP's "Wiadomości" and TVN's "Fakty". Source: own study.

The presented differences also lead to the second most frequently used conflict framework. Presenting the border situation in the context of the dispute consisted in emphasising the differences between the parties and disagreement with the other party's behaviour. The parties to the conflict were as follows: Poland or the European Union vs. Belarus, Polish government vs. political opposition, and uniformed services vs. activists and volunteers. The first dispute arose from the situation referred to as a hybrid war, where the Belarusian side tried to exert influence on Poland and, thus, on the EU institutions, seeking to lift the sanctions imposed on Belarus. Highlights included the attack, its hybrid nature, the purposefulness of the actions taken and the responding Polish and EU disagreement with such actions. TVP highlighted the protection that Poland provided with its decisive actions. "Wiadomości" also strongly emphasised the dispute between the ruling party and opposition's politicians. The latter were presented as persons damaging Poland's interests, even supporting activities beneficial to Belarus and Russia. TVP spoke of "a false picture of the situation on the border" and "a false narrative of the opposition." The same images of opposition politicians who acted to the detriment of Poland and the situation on the border were replayed multiple times (MPs: Joński, Szczerba, Starczewski, Jachira, Senate Deputy Speaker Morawska-Stanecka). Part of the dispute included the uniformed services, which PiS politicians defended from attacks by opposition politicians and the media.

TVN, which used the framework less often, showed the analysed situation more often as a dispute between the uniformed services and activists. "Fakty" intensely spotlighted the disagreement of volunteers, but also ordinary Poles, with the uniformed services' actions which prevented helping the migrants. Great medics' emotions were shown who could not help the sick, priests who were not allowed in with assistance and other people who came, out of the need of their hearts, with support and could not provide it. Two more frameworks emerge from this narrative of "Fakty": morality and human interest. In the latter, TVN showed refugees as people in need – sick, tired, in a hopeless situation when they cannot go on and cannot return when they ask for protection and cannot obtain it. The attention focused on people, their needs and emotions and all the journalistic material was presented from this perspective. In the case of the moral framework, "Fakty" emphasised the ethical obligation to assist and support people in need. It referred to Christian values of brotherly help. TVP did not use these frameworks at all, never looking at the crisis through the prism of people, although there were specific statements that they were not refugees, but migrants, which was supposed to show that they did not deserve special treatment. Instead, it directed the audience's attention to the context of a hybrid war or a hybrid attack and the role of Belarus and Russia. One TVP material was dominated by the economic

framework, which showed the border crisis in the context of the actions planned by the Belarusian regime, which earned money from that practice.

## 7. Conclusions

The analysis did not intend to prove the phenomenon of polarisation, as earlier research indicates strong divisions reflected in Polish politics in connection with an ideology with the use of the media. It was clear that the broadcasters, even in their news, were biased towards the parties they sympathised with and the ideas they promoted. The aim was to analyse the interpretative frameworks used and, thus, the rhetorical strategies that were to influence the audiences' views and attitudes towards migrants on the Polish-Belarusian border.

The analysed research material demonstrated a different length of journalistic materials. The public broadcaster unquestionably devoted more time to the discussed topic, which does not mean it was presented in-depth. TVP broadcasts were multi-threaded, and it was often difficult to read the message's primary content, which directly refers to the technique based on generating information noise. Together with the information about the current crisis, "Wiadomości" often provided data combined with images from 2015, as well as file materials from the Second World War. It repeated the same materials many times, both in subsequent editions and in the same one (the materials of the opposition politicians trying to get through the cordon of uniformed services and the Władysław Frasyniuk's statement negatively assessing the uniformed services at the border recurred most frequently).

The perpetuating dichotomy between them and us requires special attention. As a rhetorical strategy, it is reflected in the framework of the conflict and the framework of accountability. The two most represented frameworks were intended to solidify the audience in the rightness of the opinions presented, showing how hostile the opposing idea was (*echo chambers*). Although both broadcasters agreed, in the conflict framework, that the dispute between Belarus and the European Union was the reason for the border situation, the central theme emphasised the opposing sides involved in this situation in Poland. Great stress was placed on showing the heroic uniformed services, defenders of Poland and the EU, and politicians and activists attacking them (TVP), or from the other perspective - heroic volunteers and representatives of opposition parties defending sick and insecure migrants at the border against inhumanly behaving uniformed services which prevent assisting those who need help (TVN). The political struggle between the ruling party and the opposition party on this topic does not seem unusual. The conflict framework also implies even greater representativeness of the accountability framework. For

the private broadcaster, the responsibility was to ensure the safety of people who fled their own country, and for the public broadcaster – to ensure the security of the Polish-EU border. Additionally, TVP directly insisted that people at the border were not refugees but migrants (indicating the potential threat that entails). In this situation, it is worth mentioning that fears of refugees are not only a Polish domain and an element of Polish media discourse. As Almustafa (2022, 1065) points out, migrants arriving in Europe in 2015 were perceived as a threat to national security, identity and Europe’s social and cultural homogeneity. That was exemplified by the British National Party accusing the then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel of committing “genocide against Europeans” and Theresa May announcing her reluctance to help refugees because she believed that if they were strong and wealthy enough to come to Europe, they did not need it.

The *echo chamber* phenomenon is characterised as a closed communication space where the recipients’ opinions, political views and beliefs are reinforced by repeated homogeneous messages based on the same sources (Cinelli et al. 2021, 1; Hong and Kim 2016, 777–778). Lack of free flow of information, access to different and thus critical opinions, and related confirmation bias lead to even stronger polarisation and limiting discussion, and thus democracy, as mentioned earlier. Researchers analysing the phenomenon suggest that contemporary media systems help audiences enter the *echo chamber* space more effortlessly than ever before (Dubois and Blank 2018, 731). There are also voices that the described phenomenon is not as radical as some studies indicate, and the assumptions made are over-simplistic concerning the public perception of media content and the recipients’ social dynamics (Nguyen and Vu 2019, 2). The authors suggest that even assuming an intense polarisation, the recipient will be interested in learning the opposite opinion, if only to know what the opponents are saying, out of the need to monitor messages with which they disagree (Dahlgren 2020, 53). The material analyzed clearly demonstrates that both communicators create an *echo chamber*, where they only showcase their own opinions and beliefs and refer to the opposing side as their adversary. They do this by highlighting the negative impact of the opposing side’s messages, which prevents the viewers from checking the validity of their arguments. This leads to a deepening of social divisions and reinforces the belief that only one perspective is correct.

In conclusion, in light of the topic, we can speak of re-framing, i.e. formulating the message so that the problem is presented per the values and beliefs of the addressee group or in response to its problems. Simultaneously, other points of view are consciously and deliberately ignored, undermining particular journalistic diligence and integrity. Such activities increase polarisation, which results in, among others, “the impoverishment of the public debate quality (...) and the

creation of public discourse that is dangerous for minorities” (Horonziak 2022, 2016).

The migrant thread in the Polish media reality was not about people on the border. For the public broadcaster, it was a story about Polish uniformed and political services heroically protecting the borders, defending Poland and the European Union against a hybrid attack. To TVN, it was a story about the need to help, people and institutions willing to assist and those who did not want to help, i.e. the ruling party politicians. It can be stated with profound certainty that it was not a narrative about migrants and a crisis in the context of a human in need of help.

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