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Priming Europe. Two perspectives on the European Issues in Poland
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ABSTRACT

The concept of priming is regarded as one of the most prominent approaches concerning media effects. In the current study, we aim to understand how the media message is able to impact the attitudes concerning European issues. In particular, we intend to find out how these issues are primed out in the media message, as well as how they are primed in the participants' minds. When processing this research issue, we assumed that watching TV news which presents the pro-European or Euro-sceptic message causes a change of the direction of original attitude towards Europe or the EU. The material under investigation includes both pro-European and Euro-sceptic content offered by two Polish TV stations. The two-phase sequential mix-methods approach used in the study combines both the thematic analysis (504 news; TVP and TVN, 2016) and experimental design (N=192). The results of the thematic analysis revealed that two super-themes (one pro-European and one Euro-sceptic) organised media communication. The results of the experimental stage showed that the Euro-sceptic message was more effective than the pro-European one.

Keywords: priming ▪ pro-European ▪ Euro-sceptic ▪ mix-method approach ▪ TV news

1.   INTRODUCTION

The common communication and media space in Europe belongs to the weakest sides of the European integration process. The popular concept of the European Public Sphere (EPS) describes rather a postulate and the space *in the making* than a real condition (Grill & Boomgaarden, 2017). It means that integrational aspirations did not result in emerging the ESP conceived as the communicative commonwealth which comes into existence once the same European issues are discussed in different countries (Fossum & Schlesinger, 2007). Although the emerging transnational journalism networks form a certain potential for Europeanisation of national media content, in the meaning of the same topics being discussed at the same time in various national media (Risse, 2015), generally the pan-European media are still a niche limited to

the elitist media, addressing only the specific audiences (Heft, Alfter & Pfesch, 2017; Risse, 2015). Also the European online media sphere is described as being far from a common space. One reason for that are the existing online inequalities and differences, comprising diverging national networks, where nationally confined news reporting dominates which is especially visible during European Parliament elections time (Michalidou, 2015). The weakness of common communication space results in the deficiency of European identity[1] – "being European might mean different things to different people" (Galpin, 2017, p. 22). What can be observed instead is the *Europeanised nation-state identity*, in the meaning of incorporating European identity into national identities and mixing multiple understanding of what it means to be European (Galpin, 2017). The shortage of communicative commonwealth is not only institutional in its origins, but also of an axiological and emotional nature, driven by mediated fears and threats, in particular, the fear of the loss of national identity or a threat of immigration that can endanger national culture or identity (Demos, 2017).

What can be considered paradoxically as common among the European countries is the Euro-sceptic frame which is being used not only by media or political parties, but also by the EU institutions themselves. This frame is used across Europe when discussing and interpreting European-wide events or issues, e.g. during European elections, Euro-crisis, or immigration crisis (Brack & Startin, 2015; cf. Bruter, 2008). In other words, what Europeans have in common is that they observe the same essential European problems and use the same perspective (Euro-scepticism); however, these perspectives are nationally grounded (Bijsmans, 2017; Michalidou, 2015). Also when considering the term *European discourse*, the literature of the subject offers 'national filters' being generally applied in order to perceive and evaluate European issues. The differing national-political cultures and historical experience are identified as the lens through which the European integration is interpreted (Harmsen, 2008).

The Euro-scepticism is observed even in the countries considered so far as traditionally pro-European or even Euro-enthusiastic, in the meaning of representing strongly positive attitude toward the EU, including Poland. In 2018, the positive image of the EU was declared by 55 % of Polish respondents (European Commission 90, 2018). However, when observing the trend of the last five years, the lowest level of the EU positive image was noticed in 2017 (European Commission, 2017), after two years of the Euro-sceptic party Law & Justice in power. Also the European discourse in Poland has witnessed *a critical turn* in the last years, which should be attached to the major crisis in the relationship between the European Union and Poland since the EU accession in 2004. In 2015, when the party Law & Justice won the parliamentary and presidential elections, the process of introducing the radical reforms of judiciary, administration and the public media institutions took place. These fundamental changes raised major doubts on their conformity to the constitution and

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1   In the meaning of the EU identity. Both terms are used interchangeably in the literature of the subject (see e.g. Galpin, 2017), as well as in this paper.

evoked the conflict between the EU institutions, which were questioning the obedience to the rule of law and liberal democracy in Poland (Galpin, 2017; Gromadzki, 2018; Sweeney, 2018). Despite this conflict, the ruling party was supported by the significant part of the electorate, gaining the competitive advantage over the other parties (CBOS, 2018; Kantar Millward Brown, 2018).

The European communication space is at present crowded by different media channels offering diverging news contents, as well as ideological standpoints and interpretative positions. However, the traditional international media players, including TV channels, are still able to offer a mainstream content of the news. In 2017, television was considered the main supplier of the news concerning national political matters for the majority of European citizens (European Commission, 2017). Although it is clear that the position of television and press (offline and online) on the news media market is overshadowed by the online news media platforms, it is empirically proved that generally all media types set and follow the agendas of each other in the European countries and beyond – the mechanism known as the *intermedia agenda-setting* (Conway-Silva, Filer & Kenski, 2017; Harder, Sevenans & Van Aelst, 2017), as it is also the case in Poland (Nowak-Teter, 2017a). It means that national news media spaces across Europe are dominated by more or less the same (nation-wide or European) topics, offering, however, different interpretations and ideological explanations depending on the national, regional or socio-political target group which they address. Taking into account the persisting importance of television in European communication space, as well as the above-mentioned mechanism of intermedia agenda-setting, we mean that studying TV news content can give a elevant picture of mediated European issues.

The main empirical goal of the presented study is to determine the dominant evaluative perspectives used by the TV stations in Poland when presenting European issues. Drawing from the previous studies, we consider priming as dominant evaluative perspective used in political communication (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Roskos-Ewoldsen et al., 2009). We also offer the extension of the conceptual shape of the priming approach claiming that the evaluative perspective should be complemented by the positive or negative (neutral) valence (direction) of the political attitudes applied in certain media messages. In order to provide evidence to this claim, we examine the picture of the pro- and anti-EU divisions in Poland (CBOS, 2017b) in the news content broadcasted in the public (TVP) and the commercial (TVN) TV stations, representing two sides of the controversy. These divisions are probably not an exception within the European public sphere. On the contrary, they can be considered as the one of the symptoms of the socio-political divisions and conflicts during the "exit time" currently witnessed in the EU. The study aims to present how young people judge European issues, as well as whether and to what degree they are able to change their attitudes. In this respect, the concept of priming served as a theoretical approach, being also the tool of the empirical analysis. It was used when examining the content and features of the communication perspectives, which

dominated the Euro-sceptic and Euro-positive discourses in the analysed country. The same approach served when designing the test of the effects of the pro-European and Euro-sceptic communication, by taking the advantage of the experimental design and quantifying the reception side of the news media message.

Aiming to accomplish the research goals mentioned above, we proceeded by presenting and analysing the theoretical assumptions of the priming approach, as well as by complementing them by positive or negative direction of the political attitudes. The description of national political context of the pro-European and Euro-sceptic divisions precedes the explanation of two-stage qualitative (thematic analysis) and quantitative (experimental approach) research design. The results of the qualitative stage allowed us to determine the evaluative perspectives used by news media, which were then applied in the experimental survey to observe the changes of the direction of original attitudes toward Europe or the EU, as well as changes of the direction of original attitude toward the performance of the government in relation to Europe or the EU.

2. THEORETICAL APPROACH: THE CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRIMING

Priming is considered as one of the fundamental concepts in social psychology, applied also in political communication research. It draws from the cognitive approach, where it denotes mental processes engaging long-term memory being responsible for the priority effect when searching and processing information and determining context (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Priming studies have revealed the powerful ways in which our experiences can influence our present or future behaviour (Doyen, Klein, Simons & Cleeremans 2014, p. 15). The essence of the processing information consists in the cognitive accessibility of the prior stimulus that changes the way, in which the subsequent stimulus is processed. The development of priming research has also led to the conclusion that the modality of stimuli matters. It means that the same category of the prior and subsequent stimuli, in the case of the form, topic, but also the valence, makes the priming effects more plausible to happen. What makes the priming effect more likely to happen is not only the similar category to which stimuli belong, but also the features they have in common. In particular, the factors of accessibility and applicability are considered to be the two main incentives improving the likelihood of the stored knowledge to be activated at the right moment (Higgins, 1996). Accessibility of the stimulus means that it can be easily retrieved from memory and used in the subsequent processing, both in conscious and in unconscious manners (Loersch & Payne, 2014). On the other hand, the applicability of the stimulus reflects the positive relation between certain features of the stored knowledge and the attended features of the subsequent stimuli. Mental representations which gain applicability can be also activated without the perceivers' intention or awareness (Higgins & Eitam, 2014). In other words, the more accessible

and applicable the piece of information in certain processing situation is, the greater the possibility there is for this information to be used when assessing the object.

The concept of priming is regarded as one of the most prominent approaches concerning media effects (DeFrancesco, Hamilton & Machado, 2019; McCombs, 2014; Scheufele, 2000; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Van Duyn & Collier, 2018; Wright, DeFrancesco, Hamilton & Machado, 2019). Experimental design based on TV news as the most influential source of information in 1980s and 1990s, employed by Iyengar and Kinder (1987) revealed the so-called priming effect. The TV news broadcast (especially "the last minute news") was identified as being able to set the criteria for judging political issues and leaders, what was recognised as having a crucial meaning during election campaign. Also the further studies acknowledged the essential role of television and the news media when imposing the standards of political issues' evaluation and interpretation (Druckman & Holmes, 2004; Iyengar & Simon, 1993; Kiousis, Strömbäck & McDevitt, 2015). When considering the political and media contexts, generally priming is about using certain criteria (benchmark), when assessing (evaluating) the current political reality in the meaning of the most accessible political objects (news, problems, leaders) playing the role of the priming standards (Dillman-Carpentier, 2017; Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen & Dillman-Carpentier, 2009). The priming effect, on the other hand, is conceptualised as the context function, when some aspects of the political situation are presented as more important than the other, and where these aspects are able to influence the evaluation of this situation (Althaus & Kim, 2006; McCombs, 2014). In one of the most recent studies the laboratory experiments presented by Andrew Holbrook and Timothy G. Hill (2005) showed that viewing crime dramas significantly increases concerns about crime and these concerns affect viewers' evaluation of the president.

Priming is frequently cited as one of three major media effect concepts together with agenda-setting and framing (Scheufele, 2000; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007), although it is much less studied in media and political communication than agenda-setting or framing. It is probably grounded in a more demanding experimental design required in empirical priming studies (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987). In this study, we do not aim to address the differences between these concepts extensively. At the same time, for the conceptual clarity, it is reasonable to explain the essence of priming by confronting it with these related notions. While agenda-setting is about shifting salience of an issue from media agenda to public agenda, and influencing citizens by offering them a set of the most important public issues (Dearing & Rogers, 1996; McCombs, 2014; Wanta, Golan & Lee, 2004), priming is about the most important public problems (or phenomena) serving as an overall criterion for assessing political situation (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; Lee, 2010). Priming is also identified as a consequence of agenda-setting, which takes place by building opinion direction (McCombs, 2014). The third concept, which is framing, is understood as applying certain interpretation of the object, which limits choosing the interpretation of the issue to certain features of the presented subject. The process of framing results in

using frames as schemata of interpretation that help to build and understand the meaning of the subject (Borah, 2011; Entman, 1993). When comparing priming and framing, the former should be considered as providing the overall perspective which helps to make an assessment of the current political situation in general. Framing, on the other hand, which is mainly based on certain features of an object, and is able to impose the manner how the issues are understand and perceived in details. In other words, framing is about selecting some aspects of a perceived reality, and not about a general picture of this reality, as it is expected in the case of priming. Framing also concerns enhancing salience, but only of some aspect of reality, in order to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation of the object or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993). However, when looking for the approach which allows us to determine the media impact in the experimental conditions, it is the priming approach that not only includes the causality model, but also the general evaluative perspective, different from agenda-setting, i.e. the hierarchy of the most important issues and framing, i.e. the detailed interpretation based on the issue attributes (McCombs, 2014).

Drawing from previous works devoted to the priming concept (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987; McCombs, 2014), in the current study, we understand priming as the general dominant evaluation perspective applied in order to present (news media) and assess (the audience) the political situation. At the same time, when aiming to offer a conceptual and operational development of the priming approach, we assume that this dominant evaluation perspective is complemented by positive or negative (neutral) direction – valence of the political attitudes applied in certain media messages. What is then assumed is the valence compliance (with positive, negative or neutral direction) between the evaluation of the current political situation used in the media messages and evaluations reflected in the audience's attitudes. In other words, it seems possible that general meaning of the media message is not only able to stimulate general evaluation of political situation (accessibility – in our example – "Europe matters"), but also the direction of this evaluation (applicability – e. g. "we are for or against the European integration"). Consequently, taking into account the analysed national political context, the following research question has been formulated:

RQ1: What are the dominant evaluative perspectives used in the media messages concerning Europe and European Union, in terms of offering the pro- and Euro-sceptic content?

3.   PRO-EUROPEAN AND EURO-SCEPTIC DIVISIONS IN POLAND

Priming is not very often studied in political communication beyond the Western world and it is not so obvious, whether it is an exceptional US American or Western European media phenomenon or a generalizable trend across modern democracies. Therefore, using the example of Poland, that is a Central-Eastern European country, may shed additional light on this phenomenon. In this section, we explain

the political context of the research, including the conditions of the emergence of pro-European and Euro-sceptic divisions, which also take its stronger forms in Euro-enthusiastic and anti-European attitudes. These divisions are reflected in different evaluative perspectives applied in public discourse in Poland.

After populist-conservative political shift in Poland in 2015, the government and political leaders of this country belonged to the most often mentioned, when breaching European democratic norms was under consideration (Ascherson, 2016; Freedom House, 2017; Kisilowski, 2015). They also served as the example representing the Euro-sceptic policymaking, not hesitating to oppose or criticise the activity of the European Commission and to express deep differences concerning European values. However, the nationalist, populist and anti-European discourse was not the only communication strategy hold in Poland. The liberal, pro-European and anti-government media and public discourse had an equivalent if not prevalent position in the public sphere. These two discourses are conditioned in the wider and older, politically and ideologically grounded traditions, and in the party system in Poland, representing the post-communist and sharp socio-political divisions (Markowski, 2015). In line with the research results of McManus-Czubińska et al. (2003), political divisions associated with national identities in Poland include two categories, i.e. dual European-Polish seeing Poland as a part of Europe and exclusive Polish nation-centric points of view.

As a result of the 2015 parliamentary election, the right-wing coalition (The United Right) took over, where the dominant position was held by nationalist Euro-sceptic party Law and Justice, representing one third of the Polish electorate, but taking advantage of a low voter turnout and the failure of left-wing election strategies (PKW, 2015; Markowski 2016). The similar political position of the same party, leading the ruling coalition – The United Right – was ensured by the 2019 national elections. The nationalist and Euro-sceptic political strategies were also observed at the same time in Hungary (Malendowicz, 2017) and Great Britain (Henderson et al., 2017), with Euro-scepticism becoming some part of the mainstream European political debate (Brack & Startin, 2015). After the right-wing takeover in Poland in 2015, the argument between Euro-sceptic and pro-European political sides became not only more visible in media discourse, but also more tangible in the public and daily life of the citizens (Koralewski & Melhausen, 2017; Leśniczak, 2019). A severe political conflict was focussed on the issues concerning legality, the protection of minorities, and the environmental protection (e.g. the Court of Justice of the European Union's decision about Puszcza Białowieska [Curia, 2018]; the European Commission decision to launch the infringement procedure to protect the independence of the Supreme Court [European Commission, 2018]; the Emissions Trading Scheme and its impact on the power prices [Keating, 2018; see Balcer et al., 2017 for the wider context of the public discussion]).

While Poles remain in their majority the advocates of the EU membership, they are in favour of the protection of national independence within the EU at the same time (in 2017, 88% of Poles declared to be in favour the EU membership; 67% were of the opinion that the impact the country has on the EU decisions is not sufficient [CBOS,

2017b]). In 2016 Poles declared having the most positive image of the EU among all the investigated nationalities (taking also the fifth position in the EU in terms of being optimistic about its future), but they were not so strongly convinced that their "voice counts in the EU" – 46% agreed and 45% disagreed with this statement (European Commission, 2016). Simultaneously, the survey focussed on the potential "Polexit" revealed that the attitude of young people towards leaving the European Union considerably differs from the remaining groups of society. 27% respondents aged 18-29 were in favour of "Polexit", while generally in the investigated sample the vast majority was in favour of belonging to the EU, and only 16% declared being against (Balcer et al., 2017).

The frequency of the presentation of the European issues in news media in Poland remained on more or less similar level as in other European countries. The EU, its policies and institutions were more often used as a context of national events, than as a topic as such, and the share of news devoted to these issue was ranging from few to several per cent (Jas-Koziarkiewicz, 2017; Mrozowski, 2009; Stępińska, 2014). Unlike in Western Europe, where the media-driven Euro-scepticism strengthened its position after 2008 economic crisis (Caiani & Guerra, 2017), the image of the EU in Polish media remained generally positive till the parliamentary election in 2015, when the Euro-sceptic party won the election and took control over public media (Dopierała & Ossowski, 2018). The state of political divisions in Poland was also not a stable one; nevertheless, the existence of two opposing groups with contradictory attitudes toward the EU was unquestionable. These political cleavages have its clear reflection in televisual news programmes, including public and commercial TV channels (Klepka, 2018; Nowak-Teter, 2017b; Seklecka, 2017), which were playing the role of the main supplier of information about public issues in Poland at the time of the research (CBOS, 2017a). The position of the "old media" on news media market remained strong, although taking various forms of distribution and access to the content. The televisual news programmes were definitely more popular among the older groups of population, while online news was the young users' favourite source of information (CBOS, 2017a). Nevertheless, when young people were asked for the second most popular source of information about social, cultural or political issues, they pointed at televisual news programmes (Boruszkowska, 2019). At the same time, it should be noticed that the news organisations are experimenting with different kinds of television-like and online video news to reach the new, especially younger audiences (Nielsen & Sambrok, 2016), and the online video versions of televisual news have also the chance to reach the young audience.

4.   MATERIALS AND METHODS

The intent of this two-phase sequential mix-methods study was to determine the most meaningful topics (themes) of media message and the evaluative perspectives resulting from them – used by two Polish TV stations while presenting European

issues (qualitative stage), as well as to determine the capacity of the media message to change the direction of the original attitude toward Europe or the EU (quantitative stage). The usage of the mix-method design was motivated by the need of revealing the meaning of the media message in the qualitative stage and the necessity to employ the experimental (quantitative) approach generally applied in priming studies.

The selection of the commercial ("Fakty" TVN) and the public ("Wiadomości" TVP) channels and its news bulletins was grounded two-fold. These channels represent two sides of the EU debate, and they were considered as two most popular and most reliable sources of information for the majority of Poles at the time of the research (Nowak-Teter, 2017b; CBOS, 2017a). The choice of these channels allows us to characterise the positions of two sides of the above-mentioned EU debate. The first phase including qualitative exploration of the "European" message aimed to find out how European issues are primed "out". The findings from this phase were used to test the priming effect in the experimental quantitative stage, i.e. to verify whether the dependent variable, which is the participants' attitude toward Europe and the EU (experimental survey), depends on watching pro-European or Euro-sceptic message: how Europe and the EU is "primed in" the participants minds. The Euro-sceptic message is understood in line with definition of the words: *eurosceptyczny/euros-ceptycyzm* (Euro-sceptic/Euro-scepticism) offered by *Słownik Języka Polskiego* (SJP, 2019) in the meaning of being against deepening the European integration or the EU enlargement. Generally the same meaning is offered in the literature of the subject (see: Leruth, Startin & Usherwood, 2018). The pro-European message, on the other hand, is understood in line with the dictionary definition of the word: *proeurope-jski* (pro-European), which offers the meaning of being favourable toward the European integration. The same understanding can also be found in the studies devoted to pro-European attitudes, which signifies the support for the European integration (Hertner & Keith, 2017; Andrzejewska, 2016). As the neutral message, we considered the content where the attitudes toward the EU or Europe were not expressed. On the contrary to this, as the pro-European or anti-European message, we considered the media content where arguments (points) supporting or criticising the European integration or the EU were openly or implicitly expressed.

The first research question presented in previous part is going to be answered in the first qualitative stage of the research. The aim of this part of the (thematic) analysis (Guest, MacQueen, Namey, 2012) is to find out the dominant evaluative perspectives, i.e. the meaning that is most broadly pervading the selected thematic categories (related to the topics of the TV message) used to judge European issues, especially in terms of offering a certain direction of the attitudes toward Europe or the European Union. The process of data reduction and categorisation in this stage is based on inference about the prevailing meaning of media material by breaking down the raw data and then reconstituting them into categories, e.g. themes; 2) prioritising the meaning through inductive thought (Lindlof & Taylor, 2011).

The results of this stage of the analysis served as a point of departure when

designing the framework of the subsequent quantitative stage, including the form of the experimental survey. The aim of the experimental part of the study is rooted directly in the priming concept and was designed in order to make probable or reject the following hypotheses:

H1: Watching TV news which presents the pro-European message causes a change of the direction of the original attitude toward Europe or the EU into a pro-European one to a statistically significant degree.

H2: Watching TV news which presents the Euro-sceptic message causes a change of the direction of the original attitude toward Europe or the EU into Euro-sceptic one to a statistically significant degree.

The hypotheses are rooted directly in the priming concept as understood and presented in the theoretical part. In line with this concept, we also assumed the most probable direction of the attitude change. In other words, we suppose that a certain direction of media message devoted to European issues is able to impact the attitude change. However, we cannot exclude that also other variables (various former experience, knowledge and opinions about the EU or Europe being at the disposal of the experiment participants) mattered and influenced the attitude change. At the same time, we can justify our decision by the nature of priming, which takes place by adopting the most accessible evaluative perspective provided in a certain point of time.

When observing the dependent variable, i.e. the attitude toward Europe and the European Union, the cognitive dimension is represented by two components: 1) perceiving Europe or the EU as a community: *the community of member states and their unity is especially valuable and we should protect it first of all*; 2) attaching the idea of the conflict to Europe or the EU: *there is a conflict of interest among member states, including Poland, and the interest of national states should be protected first of all*. In order to measure the cognitive dimension, the participants were asked to declare their attitude toward Europe and the EU, using the five-point Likert scale. The emotional component was represented by declaring the emotions toward Europe: *how would you describe your emotions toward Europe/the EU*, and the answers include positive, negative, and the mixture of positive and negative emotions, as well as the neutral attitude and the lack of emotions. The attitudes towards Europe and the EU were separately measured. Both cognitive and emotional components of the dependent variable were expected to react to the independent variable represented by the news media messages devoted to Europe and the EU.

As we previously stated, we also assume that the dominant evaluative perspectives can be complemented by positive or negative (neutral) direction (valence) of the political attitudes applied in certain media messages, and that this direction is able to impact the assessment of the important political actors or institutions (e.g. who is right and who is not):

H3: Watching TV news which presents the pro-European messages toward Europe causes a change of the original attitude toward the performance of the government in relation to Europe;

H4: Watching TV news which present the Euro-sceptic messages toward the EU causes a change of the original attitude toward the performance of government in relation to the EU.

By offering these hypotheses, we aim to extend the understanding of the priming approach on the plausible congruence of the valence of the media messages and the relevant political assessment expressed by the receivers of these messages. We then stipulate that the direction of the political evaluation extends on the objects that are more or less associated (the government) with the political situation presented in these messages.

5.   QUALITATIVE STAGE

When aiming to identify the dominant evaluation perspectives we applied the elements of the thematic analysis, which allowed us to operationalise the primed out perspectives by the identification of themes (Guest, MacQueen & Namey 2012). In the subsequent stage, we were able to reduce the themes into the super-themes embedded in the mediated picture of the European issues, i.e. to isolate of the dominant evaluative perspectives. In order to prepare the thematic analysis, the research unit, which is singular news item, was determined, and the sampling procedure was carried out. The composite week technique (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010) allowed us to gather the sample of 504 news reflecting news items broadcasted by two TV stations in Poland in 2016, represented by "Wiadomości" of the public station TVP1, and "Fakty" of the commercial channel TVN. The public station news were the exponent of the governing coalition's political views, with its Euro-sceptic stand almost directly expressed in the media messages, while the news of commercial TVN channel represented the pro-European, liberal and overwhelmingly anti-governmental position in its mediated political communication (Klepka, 2018; Nowak-Teter, 2017b; Seklecka, 2017). The collected sample of the news became the subject of the thematic analysis, which served, in the first step, to select the news devoted or related to Europe or the European Union. As Europe-related or the EU-related news, we qualified only these cases when Europe or the EU was not only mentioned (where short mentions did not allow to analyse the evaluation of meaning of the message), but were also a significant topic or the context of the story. In the second step, we determined the dominant evaluation perspectives used when presenting the European themes (how Europe and the EU is primed out). Thus, the analytical process consisted in selecting and then refining the European themes (prevailing meaning) into super-themes (prioritising the meaning) in order to observe the dominant evaluation perspectives used when describing Europe (when the message does not concerned the issues of European Union as the organization) and European Union. The results of the thematic analysis are presented in Table 1.

6.   QUANTITATIVE STAGE

The quantitative stage based on the experimental design and included pre-test and post-test surveys in experimental and control conditions. The surveys' design was based on the structure of queries applied in the Special Eurobarometer *Future of Europe* structure (451, October 2016), and the country specific attitudinal questions (open-ended and close-ended and multiple-choice questions). The manipulation of the independent variable took place by presenting two types video materials. The first video compilation consisted of 30-minute Euro-sceptic message broadcast by public TVP1 and was watched by the first experimental group. The second video compilation contained the pro-European message (also 30 minutes) broadcast by commercial TVN and was watched by the second experimental group. The control group was not presented with the video material. Both pro-European and Euro-sceptic messages consisted of the seven (as we observed the TV news programmes under analysis included more or less this number of news) video news items in which the positive or negative evaluation of the EU or Europe was undoubted and easy to be understood. Our decision to use the TV news as an experimental stimuli for young people who generally do not watch TV news on a daily basis was grounded in the conviction that they would watch these news programmes for the first time, therefore their reaction will be more authentic (fresh) than it would have been in the case of using social media or online news. At the same time, we are aware the limitation of the sample, and we do not extrapolate the results on the wider population.

Both the experimental and control groups were asked to answer a pre-test and post-test survey containing the same set of eight questions (close-ended questions; four for Europe and four for the EU; demographic data were included in pre-test survey), devoted to the attitudes towards Europe and the EU. The survey was conducted in November 2016. Each experimental and control group consisted of 64 participants (192 in total). The participants were randomly assigned to the experimental and control group. They were male and female journalism and communication students aged 19-25. The structure of the participants was reasoned by the idea that in the case of the participants being aware that the message can impact their attitudes, the expected priming effect will be more grounded than in the case of the less deliberate participants.

The statistical analysis (Tables 2 and 3) served to compare the differences between the answers concerning the attitudes towards Europe and the European Union before (pre-test) and after (post-test) watching TV news. The data was grouped using the numerical scale, and to compute the impact of the experimental stimuli, we used the SPSS software offering the t-test, which is recommended for parametric data when comparing two paired groups (Rajaretnam, 2016). By measuring the differences between the attitudes in pre-test and post-test, as well as taking into account only the statistically significant cases, we can assume the probability of the media impact and its direction (H1 and H2), although establishing the causal relation would require further tests. In order to measure the plausible congruence of the valence of the

media messages and the relevant political assessment of the government, expressed by the receivers of this messages, we also applied the t-test (H3 and H4), allowing however for further tests to explain the possible results.

The potential threats to the internal and external validity of the research was identified and minimised by including the control group, as well as taking care of the suitable selection of the participants (randomisation; Babbie, 2007; Creswell, 2009). The t-test applied in the procedure, where the control group was observed, proved that there are not statistically significant changes in the attitudes toward Europe or the EU in the pre-test when comparing to the post-test. The participants in the experimental and control groups were separately surveyed, so that they were not able to communicate to each other (diffusion of treatment). The order of the questions in the survey was changed in the post-test to make the "automatic" answers less probable (instrumentation). Although the results of the experiment were related to certain political situation, in the meaning of pro-European and Eurosceptic divisions, the basic divisions existing in the public discourse in Poland have remained more or less the same in the last years.

7.   RESULTS

The first step of the thematic analysis, applied to the collected sample of the news media messages, served to determine how Europe and the EU are "primed out", and resulted in selecting the list of the European themes presented in Table 1. The analytical reduction of the themes related to the topics of the TV message, reflected in the selected themes, led to isolating the "super-themes", as well as to the conclusion about the dominant evaluative perspectives (second step). The results of these two steps of the analysis are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Thematic analysis of media messages devoted to Europe and the European Union (2016)

Type of media message	Themes	Examples
Europe – pro-European	European institutions take care of (worry) about rule of law and order in Poland.	"The Secretary-General of the Council of Europe concerned with 'the paralysis' of Constitutional Court." "Draft opinion of Venice Commission is very critic." "The government is not sure whether to accede to this opinion. No one is permitted to intrude in Polish affairs". "Does the government is going to ignore the opinion?" "European Parliament is concerned that the actual paralysis of the Constitutional Court threatens democracy, rule of law and human rights in Poland."
	Europe takes care of the security of citizens.	"Hunting for a terrorists in Belgium and France. Europe trembles and the services are alarmed."

Type of media message	Themes	Examples
Europe – neutral	Europe needs reforms	"The politicians across Europe are debating about reforms needed in Europe. The Brussels must listen to people. Donald Tusk says: what doesn't kill you, it makes you stronger. Manuel Valls is of the opinion that there is a time for inventing new Europe."
Europe – Euro-sceptic	Conflict between Europe and Poland	"Europe cannot afford an artificial conflict with Poland." "The draft opinion of Venice Commission evokes political emotions. The draft not only includes remarks regarding Constitutional Court, but also makes recommendations concerning amendments of Polish constitution." "An awkward leak concerning a draft opinion Venice Commission."
EU – pro-European	The EU as the defender of human rights and legality in Europe	"Parliamentary debate devoted to women's rights in PE. The reason of the debate is restrictive abortion law that is planned to be introduced." "Black protest worldwide. Women from Berlin, London, Paris and from Kenya are supporting Polish Women." "The EU alleges Poland breaching the constitution. President is going to refute the allegations against Poland." "Lech Wałęsa is appealing to the EU to rescue democracy in Poland. President of the European Commission declares there it is unlikely to introduce sanctions."
	The EU should be a unity.	"Great Britain – EU negotiations." "There is no an agreement between the EU and Great Britain. What about family allowances for immigrants?" "British are going to leave the EU because of the will of majority of them." "Young people protest against Brexit. The United Kingdom is no longer united." "Is Poland going to became peripheral country?" "Italy around the bend. After losing the referendum, the prime minister resigns and Europe asks whether Italy is going to leave the Euro-zone."

Type of media message	Themes	Examples
EU – neutral	Compromise in the EU is needed	"There is an agreement that makes Brexit less possible". "Secretary-General of the Council of Europe Thorbjorn Jagland is visiting Warsaw. The compromise between government and opposition is necessary, the Constitutional Court may be no longer paralysed." "Prime Minister Beata Szydło in Berlin. The EU should persist." "Brexit has become a reality." "Poland has an idea how to reform the EU. Jarosław Kaczyński is of the opinion we need a new treaty on European Union."
EU – Euro-sceptic	The conflict of interests among European countries dominates in the EU.	"After yesterday's failure president Tusk have to make some concessions in negotiations with Mr Cameron. Family allowances for immigrants and the reforms of the EU are at stake." "The EU (Western) countries agreed for limiting family allowances in Great Britain, and other countries, including Poland, cannot allow for it." "The opposition striving to get foreign intervention in constitutional conflict failed once more." "Immigration crisis. The EU demands 250,000 euros fine for each not accommodated refugee. It is going to make Europe becoming even more divided."
	EU is not transparent the organisation.	"The secret debate about Poland.... There is not clear whether European Commission was entitled to launch an infringement procedure." "The secret agreement between the EU and the USA. Mass protest against the introduction of the transatlantic free trade area." "After Brexit. Does Germans want a two-speed Union?"
	Poland is not going to take in refugees so far.	"The government persuades that the EU procedures are not able secure safety, and Poland is not going to take in refugees." "Support for Poland. We have more and more common affairs, including immigration, energy and many others. The president of the Czech Republic is supporting Poland against Western Countries."

Note: own elaboration

In the case of the pro-European discourse in the commercial TVN ("Fakty"), the dominant communication perspective (the first super-theme) which permeates the national discourse devoted to the European issues, can be summarised as follows: *United Europe is the defender of human rights and legality*. This view is reflected in the institutional concerns represented in official statements ("The Secretary-General of the Council of Europe concerned with 'the paralysis' of the Constitutional

Court"), which are highlighted in leads and emphasised in live reporting. Also the informal international support for the "black protests" (women's rights concerning abortion) is broadly reported and persuasively underlined in textual and visual forms media reporting. On the other hand, the Brexit issue and immigration crisis means the presented picture of Europe and the EU had also its weaknesses, and the dominant evaluative perspective cannot be described as Euro-enthusiastic. Instead, it should be determined as pro-European, including Euro-realistic concerns, in the meaning considering both the strengths and weaknesses of the European integration, reflected in neutral and balanced reporting. Nevertheless, when comparing the European utterances of the TVN messages with the same dimension of the content offered by the public TVP, it becomes clear that the evaluation perspectives used by these two stations vary significantly. The thematic categories of the content of public TV were focussed mainly on different forms and dimensions of the European conflicts. The controversies are detected not only in bilateral relations, but also on the multilateral level: "The secret debate about Poland"; "Immigration crisis.... It is going to make Europe becoming even more divided". In other words, the faulty and uneven relationships within the EU are indicated among other issues. Consequently, the second super-theme which leads to isolating Euro-sceptic evaluative perspectives, which is used by the public TV, can be summarised as follows: *The conflict of interests among European countries dominates in the EU which is not the transparent organisation.* If the neutral or less Euro-sceptic reporting appears in the message of public TV, it is conditioned in idea that the EU needs to be transformed into a more "democratic" community (in the meaning of being less Western-centric) and a more transparent organisation, which covers the interest of the Central-Eastern European countries to the greater extent: "Poland has an idea how to reform the EU"; "The president of Czech Republic is supporting Poland against Western Countries".

The conclusion concerning the first research question can thus include the following answer: the analysed Polish TVs applied two competing evaluative perspectives concerning Europe and the European Union, i.e. the pro-European and Euro-sceptic one. In other words, the supposition that the themes of Europe and the EU are primed out using two distinctive evaluation perspectives can be considered as justified and reflected in the analysed media content.

Treating this conclusion as a point of departure for the second step of the analysis, using the quantitative approach, we aimed to compare the differences between the original and the post-test attitudes towards Europe and the European Union. In other words, as we assumed in the hypotheses, we intended to determine whether watching TV news, which present the pro-European or the Euro-sceptic messages toward Europe, has the capacity to change the original attitudes toward Europe or the EU (H1 and H2).

Table 2: Paired Samples Test. Paired differences. Pro-European message for the 1st experimental group

| | | | | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Lower	Upper	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Emotions towards the EU	.05556	2.07144	.48824	-.97455	1.08566	.114	64	.911
There is a conflict in the EU	-.11111	1.07861	.25423	-.64749	.42527	-.437	64	.668
The EU as a community	-.11111	1.71117	.40333	-.96206	.73983	-.275	64	.786
Assessment of the government's policy towards the EU	-.10769	1.25154	.15523	-.41723	-.20242	-.694	64	.490
Emotions towards Europe	.000	1.237	.291	-.615	.615	.000	64	1.000
There is a conflict in Europe	.05556	1.21133	.28551	-.54682	.65794	.195	64	.848
Europe as a community	-.44444	1.14903	.27083	-1.01584	.12695	-1.641	64	.119
Assessment of the government's policy towards Europe	.00000	1.81497	.42779	-.90256	.90256	.000	64	1.000

Note: N= 64

In Tables 2 and 3 the results of the Paired Samples Tests, concerning the changes of attitudes declared by the participants watching the pro-European message of the commercial TVN ("Fakty") are presented. In the case of the pro-European message, there are not statistically significant changes of the participants' attitudes observed in the post-test. On the contrary to this observation, the results in Table 3 concerning the attitudes towards Europe and the EU, declared after watching the Euro-sceptic message (public TVP1, "Wiadomości"), show statistically significant changes revealed in the post-test. It could be considered as reasonable that only one of these two types of messages, which is the Euro-sceptic one, turn out to be effective. The most significant shift in the case of the EU can be observed in relation to the cognitive components of the attitude towards the EU, as the participants changed their mind concerning the EU as "a community" (t=-2,915; sig.=.010). Also the second cognitive component, that is perceiving "a conflict in the EU" turned out to be responsive to the media stimuli (t=-2,122; sig.=.049).

Table 3: Paired Samples Test. Paired differences. Euro-sceptic message for the 2nd experimental group

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Emotions towards the EU	.11111	.90025	.21219	-.33657	.55880	.524	64	.607
There is a conflict in the EU	-.38889	.77754	.18327	-.77555	-.00223	-2.122	64	.049
The EU as a community	-.33333	.48507	.11433	-.57455	-.09211	-2.915	64	.010
Assessment of the government's policy towards the EU	-.22222	1.00326	.23647	-.72113	.27669	-.940	64	.361
Emotions towards Europe	.77778	1.47750	.34825	.04303	1.51252	2.233	64	.039
There is a conflict in Europe	-.38889	1.53925	.36280	-1.15434	.37656	-1.072	64	.299
Europe as a community	-.44444	1.29352	.30489	-1.08770	.19881	-1.458	64	.163
Assessment of the government's policy towards Europe	-.22222	1.47750	.34825	-.95697	.51252	-.638	64	.532

Note: N= 64

In relation to the emotional component, the Euro-sceptic message proved to be persuasive in the case of "emotions towards Europe" (t=2,233; sig.=.039). As a consequence, we had to reject the H1, i.e. the assumption that watching TV news which presents the pro-European message causes a change of the direction of the original attitude toward Europe or the EU into a pro-European one to a statistically significant degree. At the same time, we ascertain the dependency expressed in H2 as probable: Watching TV news which presents the pro-European message causes a change of the direction of the original attitude toward Europe or the EU into a pro-European one to a statistically significant degree.

The remaining tests, concerning the assessment of the government performance to Europe and to the EU, did not provide statistically significant results concerning changes in the examined attitudes. Consequently, the hypotheses H3 and H4, in which we assumed that watching TV news which presents the pro-European/Euro-sceptic messages toward Europe/the EU causes a change of the original attitude toward the performance of the government in relation to the Europe/the EU, cannot be positively responded. When looking for the reasons of this discrepancy, we applied additional procedures. The linear regression test help us to determine whether there are any significant internal dependencies between the attitudes toward Europe or the EU and

the assessments of the government's European policy which can be observed at the same point of time, i.e. within the pre-test or in the post-test. The results pointed at the statistically significant dependency of the of the assessment of the government's policy toward Europe and toward the EU (independent variable) on the perception of the Europe or the EU (the dependent variable). In particular, the most significant dependency was observed in the case of the pro-European message (post-test-Europe –"emotions toward the EU"; Beta 400; Sig .001). This outcome suggests that the attitudes toward the performance of the government in relation to Europe and the EU can be consistent with the attitudes declared toward Europe and the EU as such, and that might be the reason they are not susceptible to the changes in response to the media message.

8.   DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of priming, traditionally investigated using the experimental design, assumes the quantitative approach when collecting and analysing the data. In the current study, however, the quantitative phase of the investigation is based on the survey experiment being supplemented by the qualitative-preceding phase, which is applied in order to isolate the dominant evaluative perspectives (the super-themes) of the observed national discourse devoted to Europe and the EU. This qualitative stage allowed us to answer the first research question and to determine the two most meaningful super-themes organising the public discourse in terms of the attitude to the European issues. The first perspective, which can be summarised in the following sentence: *United Europe is the defender of human rights and legality*, is definitely the pro-European in its meaning. The second perspective: *The conflict of interests among European countries dominates in the EU, which is not the transparent organisation*, is clearly the Euro-sceptic one, and is justified by the faulty relationships within the EU. The determination of the relationship between these two perspectives (which of them is more popular), applied in media communication and supported by its recipients, is not the subject of the study. Nevertheless, as we can observe from the numbers of voters supporting the oppositional and mainly pro-European political parties on the one hand, as well as the governing Euro-sceptic coalition on the other, the cleavages are strong (somewhat fluctuating) and separating the electorate into two, more or less comparable, political camps, with the prevalence of the governing coalition taking an advantage in the last two parliamentary elections.[2]

These two perspectives, however, turned out to be not equivalent when their impact on the attitudes towards the EU and Europe was considered. What the results of the experimental stage of the research showed was that the pro-European message

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2   In 2015 parliamentary election, the Euro-sceptic party Law & Justice won almost 38% of votes, and the strongest oppositional and pro-European party Civic Platform got 24% of votes. In 2019, these parties won respectively almost 44% and over 27% of votes. In both cases of 2015 and 2019 elections, the pro-European camp was supported with less popular liberal and left wing parties of more or less 12-13% of supporting votes (PKW, 2019).

was much less effective than the Euro-sceptic one. Consequently, we were not able to substantiate the plausibility of the first hypothesis, assuming that watching TV news which presents the pro-European message toward Europe causes a change of the original attitude toward Europe to a statistically significant degree. At the same time, we consider as probable the second hypothesis, presuming that watching TV news which presents the Euro-sceptic messages toward European Union causes a change of the original attitude toward the EU to a statistically significant degree. These results are also congruent with the national survey data showing a significant decrease in the support of the European integration. In particular, in the last ten years, there has been a visible increase of the share of the opinion that the "European integration has gone too far". The biggest increase was observed in 2013, 2014 and in 2016, when 33%, 29% and 28% of respondents respectively believed that the integration had gone too far (CBOS, 2019). The research carried out in Western countries revealed similar results, as the sentiments expressed toward the European issues were more often negative than positive (Ruiz-Soler, 2019). The consequences of these observations may be considered both in short- and long-term perspectives. The former can bring a constructive criticism of the EU, while the long-lasting Euro-scepticism may be dangerous for the EU legitimacy.

We were not able to observe any significant impact of the pro-European or Euro-sceptic message on the assessment of the Polish government performance in relation to Europe or the EU. This result can be at least partially explained by means of a certain degree of political sophistication of the participants. As social science students, they can be more independent in their assessment of the governmental European policy than an average citizen, as well as more critical to media message, and, as I mentioned in the previous section, they could be less prone to media impact, so the presented results of the analysis can be underestimated. This explanation can have at least partial confirmation in the consistency of the pro-European attitudes, which are related to the participants' assessment of the performance of the government toward the EU. It is also possible that the multiplicity of the sources used by the young participants when gaining political knowledge played a role, and, as a result, the TV messages were not able to influence their opinion.

When concluding about the results of the two-stage mix-method investigation process, we should state that we were able to observe that the priming effect did take place; however, the media impact was limited to certain components of the media message. In other words, what was primed out was not necessarily (exactly) primed in. In this respect, we have to take into account the limitations of the study, which is that the participants were recruited from university students, and that the results of the analysis can be extrapolated only for young, educated citizens. However, taking into account the kind of communicative sophistication of journalism students, we can also presume that the impact of media message, observed among the general audience, could have been even stronger. Therefore, the further priming studies, including multiple channels of the online and social media,

should be able to provide an answer to the impact of media message embedded in the European context.

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