

## СИТУАЦІЯ В УКРАЇНІ ТА СПОСОБИ ЇЇ ВИРІШЕННЯ В ОЦІНЮВАННЯХ ПОЛЯКІВ

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Досліджено формування громадської думки у Польщі на тему ситуації в Україні від 2014 року. Зокрема, проаналізовано медійну інформацію як головний чинник впливу на громадську думку. Показано ступінь відповідності поглядів поляків образу ситуації в Україні, витвореному польською пресою.

**Ключові слова:** *громадська думка, ситуація в Україні, Польща.*

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest ukazanie procesu kształtowania się opinii publicznej w Polsce na temat sytuacji na Ukrainie od roku 2014. Jednym z głównych czynników wpływających na ocenę zachodzących zmian były niewątpliwie doniesienia medialne. Artykuł ukazuje w jakim stopniu poglądy Polaków były zbieżne z obrazem sytuacji na Ukrainie przedstawianym w polskiej prasie. W celu zweryfikowania przyjętych założeń w artykule zastosowano metodę opisową, porównawczą oraz analizę badań sondażowych.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *opinia publiczna, sytuacja na Ukrainie, sondaż*

### SITUATION IN UKRAINE AND WAYS TO SOLVE IT ACCORDING TO POLES

Katarzyna Maciejewska-Mieszkowska

The purpose of the article is to present the process of shaping public opinion on the situation in Ukraine under the influence of current political events, even if knowledge about them came mainly from media reports. The publication uses descriptive and comparative methods as well as the analysis of opinion surveys conducted by the Center for Social Opinion Research (CBOS). The article uses 11 research reports and the report titled “Polish Press Debate on the Conflict in Ukraine. Comparative Perspective 2014–2015”, created by the Laboratory of Media Studies of the University of Warsaw. The analysis of the above materials shows that Ukraine was perceived by public opinion in Poland as a weaker side in the conflict, defending itself from aggression, whose pro-democratic and pro-European aspirations deserved support of the international community. This conflict was also perceived as a potential threat to security not only for Poland or Europe, but also for the world. Possible scenarios of its completion, in most cases, indicated that Ukraine would incur territorial losses. Only 3 % of the respondents believed that Ukraine would recover all its lost land. In general, the Poles’ opinions on both the situation in Ukraine and variants for ending the conflict were consistent with those presented in that period in the press releases of the most important Polish newspapers and magazines.

**Key words:** *public opinion, situation in Ukraine, opinion poll.*

The media is the factor which is extremely important in shaping the views of recipients on a political situation, especially on the international scene [Dobek-Ostrowska 2007; Hofman, Magoś 2014; Ociepka 2002]. This is especially important when recipients know a particular issue only (or mainly) from the media. One of such events is undoubtedly the armed conflict in Ukraine which started in 2014. According to Poles’ declarations, in October 2014, as many as 93 % of them drew on information from public affairs and news programs on the radio and television, 49 % from paper newspapers and magazines, 52 % from friends, family members or other people and 49 % from the internet, for example from news portals, social networking sites, online newspaper sites and blogs [Kowalczyk 2014d: 2].

Taking into account the above data and the fact that the content delivered by the media not only informed but also commented on the already existing reality, it can be assumed that as a consequence, they essentially influenced Poles’ opinions on the situation in Ukraine. In this way, public opinion is to be understood as “the totality of opinions, measured by surveys, which are dominant in a particular community, and which refer to matters important to the community” [Marshall: 220].

The purpose of the article is to present the process of shaping public opinion on the situation in Ukraine under the influence of current political events, even if knowledge about them came mainly from media reports. The publication uses descriptive and comparative methods as well as the analysis of opinion surveys.

Particular attention, in the context of the opinion of Poles on the situation in Ukraine, should be paid to studies conducted by (created in 1982) the Center for Social Opinion Research (CBOS), which has regularly carried out research surveys since the early 1990s. Taking into account the role and the quality of the research, by the Act of February 20, 1997, the Sejm gave CBOS “the status of an independent foundation and entrusted the task of carrying out social research for public use. Since then, the plans and quality of research work have been overseen by the CBOS Council consisting of specialists from seven academic institutions and representatives of the Sejm, the Senate, the President of the Republic of Poland and the Prime Minister” [“Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej. O Firmie”, n. d.]. In the article, 11 research reports published in the period from 2014 to 2017 have been subjected to analysis.

First, there should be distinguished two types of surveys conducted by CBOS and concerning Ukraine and Polish-Ukrainian relations. The first one is, implemented systematically for over a dozen years, monitoring of changes in the attitude of Poles to different nations, including the Ukrainians, which allows observing and analyzing the development of relations between Poles and their neighbors.

The other type of research is carried out on a regular basis and applies to current events which at the moment are an important part of social and/or political life. Euromaidan, annexation of Crimea or fighting in the East of Ukraine are undoubtedly such events.

At the same time, it should be noted that all surveys carried out by CBOS are conducted “on representative groups of adult Polish citizens drawn from the population register system PESEL [*General Electronic Registration System – the author’s note*]. Such a sample group should consist of about 1000 people to be statistically representative of all adult Poles. The drawn sample group must correspond to the data of GUS [*the Central Statistical Office – the author’s note*], such as: age, gender, type and size of a place of residence. Candidates for survey receive a prospect card and then an interviewer visits them. CBOS conducts face-to-face computer-assisted interviews (CAPI)” [“Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej”, n.d].

A starting point for analyzing Poles’ assessments is to determine what picture of the situation in Ukraine since the Euromaidan period has been obtained by means of press releases. The report “Polish Press Debate on the Conflict in Ukraine.

Comparative Perspective 2014–2015” presented by the Laboratory of Media Studies of the University of Warsaw shows, for example, that:

– “in both examined periods [*in 2014 and 2015 – the author’s note*] there was a prevailing tendency to define Russia as a dominant actor in the conflict – the player who handles the cards, while the internal situation of Ukraine was presented as bad or very bad” [“Polski dyskurs prasowy o konflikcie na Ukrainie. Perspektywa porównawcza 2014–2015”, n. d.: 6];

– “the authors of these articles in 2014 indicated that it was equally likely that the conflict would intensify as well as freeze, and even would be resolved (possibly without the participation of other countries). One year later, they predicted that more negative scenarios would be likely, namely, the tightening and spread of the conflict or the acceptance of the annexation of Crimea by the international community and Ukraine itself” [ibid.: 6];

– “between 2014 and 2015 there was a change in the journalists’ perception of the events on Crimea. In 2014, the main focus was on the Crimean events and the conflict on the axis Russia – Ukraine. A year later the articles departed from a detailed description of events to reflect on the European and world perspective” [ibid.: 49];

– “the scenarios created by journalists mistakenly predicted further expansion of Russia (outside Ukraine), with the post-Soviet states being most vulnerable to attacks by the Russian Federation. In both research cycles, the press often hypothesized that Crimea is the first but not the only object of interest in Russian expansion policy” [ibid.: 107].

These conclusions are the result of an analysis of the content of more than 50 press titles, including all the most important journals and periodicals published in Poland (with the highest circulation and readership level). The study covered a total of 311 articles in 2014 and 119 in 2015. It can therefore be assumed that the researched message was widely available for an average recipient and might have substantially contributed to the assessment of the situation in Ukraine, which in Poland was of great interest to the public. The fact that Poles were very interested in the events in Ukraine was reflected in the results of surveys conducted by CBOS between February 2014 and February 2016. They clearly show the vast majority of respondents declared their interest in the issue (see Table 1).

Table 1

Level of interest in the situation in Ukraine in the years 2014–2016

Are you interested in events in Ukraine or not?	2014											2015		2016
	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	II	VI	II	

	In percents												
Yes, I'm very interested.	10	28	21	18	14	10	24	27	22	18	17	12	7
Yes, I'm a little interested.	55	60	64	61	57	58	59	61	61	60	59	57	55
No, I'm rather not interested.	16	7	10	13	15	16	8	7	9	12	13	16	20
No, I'm not interested at all.	18	5	5	8	13	16	9	5	8	10	11	14	17
It is hard to say.	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Source: M. Herrmann, *Zainteresowanie sytuacją na Ukrainie i poczucie zagrożenia*, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K\\_033\\_16.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_033_16.PDF), p. 2.

In addition, at the beginning of February 2014, 63 % of respondents said that their sympathy was with the Euromaidan protesters, only 1 % supported Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, and 31 % did not agree on either side of the conflict [Roguska 2014: 3]. According to Poles, the main purpose of the protest was the desire for political change, including the resignation of V. Yanukovich from the post of head of state (56 %) and the desire to bring Ukraine closer to the European Union (EU) (55 %). The belief prevailed “in all socio-demographic groups. It should be noted that “the situation in Ukraine is perceived similarly by people with different political orientations, that is, both those who identify themselves with the left and those who declared right-wing political views” [Roguska 2014: 4].

In February and March 2014, most Polish respondents believed that Poland should support pro-democracy and pro-European actions of Ukraine (52 %) [Roguska 2014: 5] and then its newly created government (67 %), but only through acting with other EU countries [Kowalczyk 2014c: 4]. In April 2014, surveys showed that, according to respondents, the organizations that should commit to solving problems in Ukraine are primarily the EU (78 %) and the United Nations (UN) (75 %). More than half of the respondents also pointed to the United States (57 %) and Poland (53 %), and 34 % to the Russian Federation [Kowalczyk 2014b: 4].

Most of respondents (52 %) assessed the position of the Polish authorities on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict as appropriate. What is more, “Three-fourths of the respondents in favor of Poland’s involvement in Ukraine are convinced of the rightness of Poland’s position (75 %), but only one in four oppose such engagement (27 %). So it can be said that most of the people critical of Poland’s position on this issue do not so much negatively evaluate the actions of Polish diplomacy, but they simply question the very fact of our country’s involvement in this conflict. Despite the conviction of the majority of respondents that the Polish position is correct, they are very critical about the implications for the future of our country. Almost two thirds (64 %) believe that in the long run Poland will suffer negative consequences of its current position” [Kowalczyk 2014b: 5].

It is also worth noting that when in September 2014 respondents were asked to evaluate current involvement of the international community in resolving the conflict, this assessment was unfavorable for all organizations listed in the survey. According to the respondents, the engagement of the organizations was too small. The opinion was expressed for the respective institutions by: 67 % of the respondents for the UN, 64 % of the respondents for the EU, 55 % of the respondents for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and 42 % for the Organization of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) [Omyłka-Rudzka 2014: 5].

The respondents also believed that in the current situation the actions of international community should take the following forms:

- exerting diplomatic pressure on Russia – 79 %;
- granting financial aid to Ukraine – 70 %;
- tighter economic sanctions against Russia – 67 %;
- rearmament of the Ukrainian army – 37 %;
- sending troops, soldiers to Ukraine – 21 %;
- easing economic sanctions imposed on Russia – 12 % [Omyłka-Rudzka 2014: 6].

At the same time, the annexation of Crimea and the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine aroused serious concerns among Poles about the widely understood security. In February 2015, 75 % of respondents believed that the situation in Ukraine threatened the security of Poland, 67 % – the security in Europe, and 55 % – the security in the world [Kowalczyk 2015b: 2]. In the context of Poles feeling the security threat, it should be noted that “Among the respondents who declared a general sense of threat, the overwhelming majority voiced fears that the situation in Ukraine would affect the Polish economy (92 %) and the state of energy security (83 %). Most of them are also afraid of war, which may spread in Poland (59 %). However, every third respondent declaring sense of threat (30%) claims that there is no military danger at present. So, on the one hand, not everyone generally concerned about Poland’s security thinks that the threat of direct aggression towards our country is real, while on the other hand, most of the respondents who do not fear about Poland’s security believe that the situation in Ukraine threatens our economy (68 %) and energy security (56 %)”

[Kowalczyk 2014d: 6]. Concerns about the Polish economy were related to the economic sanctions that the EU imposed on the Russian Federation, which in response introduced its own trade restrictions on members of the European community, including Poland [Kowalczyk 2014a: 6; Kowalczyk 2015a: 3–5].

Significantly, in spite of the passage of time, Polish respondents persistently declare the need to support the pro-democracy and pro-European aspirations of the Ukrainians. In February 2016, 67 % of respondents maintained the opinion, of whom 57 % thought this should be done, but only with other EU countries, and 8% thought that Poland should support them in a special way [Herrmann 2016: 5]. The research also shows that “the postulated degree of Poland’s involvement in solving the crisis in Ukraine is partly related to the assessment of Polish-Ukrainian relations (...). The respondents evaluating them positively are less likely to

express the belief that Poland should remain passive in the face of the crisis in Ukraine (16 %), and they quite often express the opinion on the necessity of supporting Kyiv within the policy set by the European Union (67 %). The respondents in this group more often think that Poland should play a special role in resolving the conflict (16 %). The respondents assessing the relations between Poland and its eastern neighbor with greater distance, most often advocate not engaging in the Ukrainian crisis (47 %)” [Herrmann 2016: 6]. The views on accepting refugees from the areas of Ukraine under fighting were also relatively stable. Since August 2015, this indicator has been consistently above 50 % (see Figure 1). This is especially important if we consider the fact that in 2017 as many as 74 % of Polish respondents opposed the relocation of refugees arriving in the EU from Middle East and Africa, of which 43 % were definitely against it.

Table 2

**Poles’ attitude to receiving refugees from the east of Ukraine in 2015–2017**

Due to the conflict in the east of Ukraine, there has been an increase in the number of refugees from this country. Do you think that Poland should receive Ukrainian refugees from conflict areas?																	
	2015				2016												2017
	In percents																
	VIII	IX	X	XII	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	IV
Definitely yes	11	13	15	14	13	12	12	14	13	12	10	10	10	13	10	12	11
Rather yes	39	48	46	46	48	47	50	46	44	45	47	44	47	46	46	46	44
Rather not	22	18	20	20	18	19	18	17	18	19	20	21	20	18	22	21	24
Definitely not	16	10	14	13	13	15	15	16	19	17	15	19	18	16	18	16	16
It is hard to say	12	11	5	7	8	7	5	7	6	8	8	6	6	7	4	5	5

Source: A. Głowacki, *Stosunek do przyjmowania uchodźców*, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K\\_044\\_17.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K_044_17.PDF), p. 4.

Opinions on the reception of refugees from Ukraine were largely differentiated due to the political preferences of respondents. The results of the research show that “potential voters of the Modern party (Nowoczesna) are most accommodating to receiving refugees from eastern Ukraine (86 % support), as well as voters of the Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska) (72 %). Those who would vote in favor of the Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) and Kukiz’15, less often agree to provide shelter to Ukrainians from threatened areas, but even among them the acceptance exceeds 50 % (57 % and 52 % respectively)” [Głowacki 2017: 5]. In February 2016, respondents were asked to evaluate what the future of Ukraine would look like and whether it would be able to maintain its independence from the Russian Federation in the near future. Only 3 % of the respondents believed that Ukraine would recover

all its lost land, and 22 % that the eastern part of the state would remain within its borders, but the state would not recover Crimea anymore. According to 25 % of the respondents Ukraine would eventually lose the territories currently controlled by the separatists, but the rest of the country would maintain independence. In the opinion of 14 % of the respondents, Kyiv would lose control over other regions, but would retain its independence from Russia. The last answer proposed by CBOS assumed that the Russian Federation was likely to subjugate all of Ukraine. 16 % of the respondent considered it to be a likely option for ending the conflict [Herrmann 2016: 3].

The above results of CBOS research concerned the so-called current events in Ukraine. It is advisable, however, to refer them to the systematic study, carried on for several years, on Poles’ opinion about Ukrainians as a nation. Based on the study, it can be seen that since 2008,

the declarations of Poles have been changing slowly but systematically (see Table 2), which in 2017 resulted in

the predominance of respondents expressing sympathy for Ukrainians over respondents declaring aversion.

Table 3

**The level of sympathy and dislike towards Ukrainians as a nation in the years 1993–2017**

Ukrainians	Respondents' answers according to study dates																						
	'93	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	'16	'17
	In percents																						
Sympathy	12	9	14	16	15	13	16	19	22	19	29	23	24	25	34	34	32	32	31	34	36	27	36
Dislike	65	66	63	60	60	59	58	49	48	51	34	50	42	39	31	29	33	32	33	33	32	34	32

Source: M. Omyłka-Rudzka, *Stosunek do innych narodów*, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K\\_021\\_17.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K_021_17.PDF), pp. 3–4.

Another aspect worth noting is the assessment of Polish-Ukrainian relations, since surveys show that also in this case there was an increase in positive opinions and most importantly a decisive decline in negative ratings (see Table 3). Of course these are gradual changes and

conditioned by many variables taking place in the political and social space in relations between Poland and Ukraine, however, pro-democracy and pro-European aspirations in Ukraine also translate into positive assessment in the opinions of Polish respondents.

Table 4

**Assessment of Polish-Ukrainian relations in 2013–2016**

How do you assess the current Polish-Ukrainian relations?	Respondents' answers according to study dates					
	VII 2013		VII 2014		II 2016	
	In percents					
Definitely good	1	21	3	37	1	29
Rather good	20		34		28	
Neither good nor bad	39		43		48	
Rather bad	13	16	6	7	7	8
Definitely bad	3		1		1	
It is hard to say	24		13		14	

Source: M. Herrmann, *Zainteresowanie sytuacją na Ukrainie i poczucie zagrożenia*, [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K\\_033\\_16.PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_033_16.PDF), p. 2.

Comparing the contents of the press releases with Poles' opinions presented in CBOS studies, it can be stated first of all that the situation in Ukraine is neither an unknown or indifferent subject for Poles. Respondents were interested in what was happening at their neighbors' and were aware of the importance of the events.

Both articles and surveys also indicate that Ukraine was perceived by public opinion in Poland as a weaker side in the conflict, defending itself from aggression. In addition, the vast majority of respondents expressed the view that broad support from the international community is necessary in order to continue the pro-democracy and pro-European course adopted by the present Ukrainian authorities, the support which in the respondents' opinion was so far insufficient. Most respondents also believed that the conflict in Ukraine could threaten security in Europe and even in the world. Of course, the very fact of the social awakening that took place in Ukraine was not without significance for assessment of the situation in the country by the Polish

public. The evidence is, among other things, the fact that the first significant increase in sympathy for Ukrainians as a nation occurred in 2004, when the Orange Revolution took place. The social reaction expressed in the Euromaidan protests against not signing the EU association agreement by V. Yanukovich, and the subsequent pro-democracy and pro-European change in policy of the new Ukrainian authorities influenced the Poles' attitude to the current events in Ukraine.

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