

# From the regional press to Orlen Press

The situation of the media owned  
by Polska Press



HELSINKI FOUNDATION  
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

*From the regional press to Orlen Press. The situation of the media owned by Polska Press*

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**Fundusz Obywatelski  
im. Henryka Wujca**

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# Summary

- ◆ The takeover of Polska Press, the largest publisher of regional media in Poland, by PKN Orlen has had a negative impact on the freedom of journalistic activity in these media.
- ◆ The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights interviewed journalists at various levels (including editors-in-chief and heads of departments) who worked or have been working in regional newspapers published by Polska Press after it was taken over by PKN Orlen. The average length of employment of an interviewed respondent in Polska Press outlets was 18 years (see Appendix 1 – Methodology).
- ◆ The interviews conducted focused both on the situation before the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen in December 2020 and on the situation after the takeover. The interviews were conducted between August 2022 and April 2023. Therefore, the report presents only part of the changes taking place at Polska Press (including staff and management changes).
- ◆ The interviews devoted to the situation in the Polska Press media up to December 2020 revealed a number of significant problems faced by journalists. During this period (up to December 2020), one of the main problems identified by interviewees was negative employment conditions, consisting of, among other things, the lack of a stable employment basis (including, for example, an employment contract), low pay and violations of workers' rights (e.g. lack of overtime compensation).
- ◆ When asked how they assess their journalistic freedom in the period up to December 2020, the journalists predominantly stated that they were completely free in their choice of topics and that interventions in the material they produced were only justified by factual reasons. Nevertheless, interviewees pointed out that until December 2020, the choice of topics and the way they were presented were significantly influenced by corporate policies aimed at maximising advertising revenue in online editions. This policy encouraged the development of a journalism that often chose trivial but interesting topics for the reader ("clickbait pieces"). This practice was criticised by interviewees as unfavourable to the development of sophisticated journalism.
- ◆ The takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen, which began in December 2020, has triggered a number of changes in the way the editorial offices of the regional media operate, including changes in editorial teams, the recruitment of new staff and changes in employment conditions.

- ◆ According to the respondents, the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen has not significantly improved the pay of journalists. According to some respondents, the supplements and fuel vouchers granted have not significantly improved pay conditions. On the other hand, some interviewees appreciated that after the change of ownership, certain issues related to the protection of workers' rights, such as the accounting of overtime and weekend work, had been sorted out.
- ◆ After the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen, the editorial offices concerned underwent extensive restructuring. The respondents primarily noted the change of editors-in-chief and deputy editors-in-chief. Respondents were often critical of the competence and journalistic performance of the new editors-in-chief. In individual cases, according to the interviewees, the appointment of new editors-in-chief could also be motivated by political interests.
- ◆ With the change in editorial management, the editorial line and the degree of journalistic freedom also changed. The interviewees pointed out cases where their work was hindered, e.g. by indicating (explicitly or implicitly) topics that were not allowed to be covered (these topics included issues of worldview), or by the one-sided production of materials in order to present the ruling majority in a favourable light or to avoid criticism of PKN Orlen. At the same time, interviewees pointed out that PKN Orlen was pursuing a policy of maximising revenue from online advertising, which still favoured the promotion of pieces with attention-grabbing titles at the expense of in-depth journalistic content.
- ◆ The personnel changes made by the new management of Polska Press, as well as the cases of interference with the freedom of journalistic activity, led some interviewees to conclude that the independence of regional media is limited. Some pointed out that the regional media "have still a long way to go become another TVP Info" [a government-controlled TV news channel], while others pointed out that they have already started to operate in a way resembling TVP evening news. According to some interviewees, the upcoming 2023-2025 elections will be an important touchstone for the quality of regional media journalism and its independence.

## Timeline<sup>2</sup>

<b>1990</b>	Liquidation of the state-owned RSW Prasa-Książka-Ruch, a media conglomerate which published 35 independent regional and local daily newspapers in the late 1980s. The early 1990s also saw the privatisation of the regional and local press, including the rise of foreign publishers in Poland, such as the French capital group Robert Hersant (e.g. Socpresse, Polska Presse), the Norwegian Orkla or the Swiss J. Marquard.
<b>1994</b>	The German publishing group Passau buys the newspapers of the Robert Hersant Group in Poland, including Polska Presse.
<b>End of the 1990s until 2013</b>	a period of duopoly during which the regional media market was dominated by Orkla Media (bought by the British Mecom Group in 2006) and Polska Press
<b>2013</b>	Consolidation on the regional media market, Polska Press takes over most titles of the regional press
<b>25 October 2015</b>	The victory of the United Right in the parliamentary elections and the beginning of discussions on the “repolonisation” of the media
<b>19 October 2016</b>	The first press reports about the attempted takeover of Polska Press by pro-government companies
<b>9 October 2020</b>	The Economist reports on PKN Orlen's plans to take over Polska Press
<b>7 December 2020</b>	PKN Orlen concludes a preliminary sales agreement with the Verlagsgruppe Passau Polska Press
<b>14 December 2020</b>	The Ombudsman opens an investigation into the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen on his own initiative; during the procedure, the Ombudsman appealed the decision of the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection to allow PKN Orlen to take over Polska Press
<b>8 April 2021</b>	The Competition and Consumer Protection Court issued an order suspending the execution of the contested decision of the President of the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection
<b>March – April 2021</b>	The first changes in the Polska Press Management Board
<b>April 2021</b>	The first reports on the termination of the contracts with the previous editors-in-chief of the Polska Press newspapers
<b>8 June 2022</b>	The Competition and Consumer Protection Court dismisses the Ombudsman's appeal against the decision of the President of the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection

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<sup>2</sup> The references used to cover the first 25 years of the timeline include: Filas, Ryszard. Dzienniki regionalne w Polsce po likwidacji duopolu. *Krajobraz po wielkiej fuzji. Komunikowanie lokalno-regionalne w dobie społeczeństwa medialnego*. Tom 1: Problemy teoretyczno-praktyczne. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2018. 55-69; Filas, Ryszard. “Od duopolu do monopolu. Dzienniki regionalne w Polsce w XXI wieku: próba bilansu.” *Rocznik Prasoznawczy* 11 (2017): 61-78.; Szynol, Adam. “Czy Polsce wciąż potrzebna jest regionalna prasa codzienna?.” *Zeszyty Prasoznawcze* 3 (231) (2017): 468-493; Szynol, Adam. “Obcy kapitał w polskiej prasie ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem dzienników regionalnych w dwadzieścia lat po przełomie.” *Dziennikarstwo i Media* 1 (2010): 81-100; Bajka, Zbigniew. “Kapitał zagraniczny w polskiej prasie - lata dziewięćdziesiąte.” *Zeszyty prasoznawcze* 1-2 (1998): 21-35.

# 1. Regional media market in Poland

The Polish media market consists of government-dependent public media (radio and television) and independent private media (press, television and radio, and also online media). The press segment is divided into national outlets (including the largest newspapers and weeklies) and regional and local outlets. Since 2000, the press market has undergone systemic changes – with the development of information media on the internet, press market revenues have declined by 51% between 2004 and 2019. Since 2015, the number of press readers in Poland has systematically decreased (from almost 30% in 2015 to 17% in 2021<sup>2</sup>). In addition, the sale of daily newspapers has been systematically declining for years and this trend has intensified in recent years.<sup>3</sup>

All these phenomena also have a negative impact on the state of the regional press in Poland.

## 1.1. Polska Press

Polska Press, originally called Polskapresse, is a publishing group active in the Polish market since 1991. In 1994, it was bought from its founder, Robert Hersant, by the Passauer Neue Presse, and in 2000, in the course of a restructuring, it was incorporated directly into Verlagsgruppe Passau. At the same time, the group expanded its portfolio by acquiring shares in publishers of various regional newspapers. In the late 1990s, there was a duopoly in the regional press market between Polskapresse and Orkla, with Polskapresse controlling slightly fewer titles than its Norwegian competitor. In 2001, Polskapresse and Orkla had 9 and 11 titles, respectively, and their spheres of influence were divided into individual provinces. While the newspapers published by Polskapresse appeared in the largest regional cities from Tricity to Kraków and Katowice, the titles of the Norwegian group were published in the eastern and western regions of Poland.<sup>4</sup>

In the following years, Polskapresse strengthened its position in the local media market. In 2006, Orkla withdrew from Poland and sold its shares to the British holding company Mecom Europe. The former Orkla titles formed the Media Regionalne (Regional Media) group. Polskapresse's monopoly began in 2013 when the group took over Media Regionalne, with the exception of Dziennik Wschodni (when approving this takeover, the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection ordered Polska Press to sell Dziennik Wschodni so that no single company would dominate the market for the regional press in the Lublin region<sup>5</sup>). A year later, Polskapresse consolidated its position by buying Express Media, which published two newspapers.

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2 Accenture, Poland News Media Landscape Trends, 2021.

3 Szynol A., "Czy Polsce wciąż potrzebna jest regionalna prasa codzienna?", Zeszyty Prasoznawcze, Kraków 2017.

4 Filas R. "[Od duopolu do monopolu. Dzienniki regionalne w Polsce w XXI wieku: próba bilansu](#)", Rocznik parasoznawczy 11 (2017).

5 Szynol A., Czy Polsce...

In 2015, the company changed its name to Polska Press, which is still valid today. Since then, Polska Press' portfolio has consisted of 20 local newspapers in 15 provinces.<sup>6</sup> In addition, Polska Press publishes local weekly newspapers, the free newspaper [naszemiasto.pl](http://naszemiasto.pl) and supplements to newspapers and trade publications. Figures published by Polska Press show that the publishing house currently employs 2,400 people and publishes 47,000 online articles a month.<sup>7</sup>

Average circulation figures vary from title to title – in Q3 2022 they ranged from 14,000 copies (Gazeta Pomorska) to 1,000 copies (Kurier Lubelski).<sup>8</sup> In 2022, Polska Press sold an average of 120,000 newspapers per day.

Polska Press also operates 23 regional online news services, which correspond to the paper editions, as well as the network of municipal news services [naszemiasto.pl](http://naszemiasto.pl). [Naszemiasto.pl](http://naszemiasto.pl) is the most popular online source for local and regional news and is used by about 31% of all users of such news.<sup>9</sup>

Most of the regional newspapers published by Polska Press are still the most widely read press titles in certain regions, such as the most read provincial newspapers Nowa Trybuna Opolska (Upper Silesia region), Gazeta Krakowska (Lesser Poland region) and Nowiny (Rzeszów region), Gazeta Lubuska (Lubusz region) or the second most read Dziennik Bałtycki, or the third most read Dziennik Zachodni (Lower Silesia region) and Głos Wielkopolski (Greater Poland region).<sup>10</sup>

The daily newspapers published by Polska Press differ in character and structure but share many common features. All titles focus on local and regional news. Many newspapers have a special Friday edition called a “magazine” in which feature pieces and commentaries set the tone.

All daily newspapers have online portals, some of which have several local versions. Interviews revealed that the corporate strategy of moving from paper to online was not uniform – in some regions, websites were seen as the future of a particular title and content was created specifically for the online edition and prioritised at the expense of the paper edition; in other regions, the online and paper editions operated in parallel, with the same content published in both. In 2018, Polska Press was awarded a nomination for the Grand Press Digital Award for its dynamic transformation in the digital sphere and especially in video content.<sup>11</sup>

The growing popularity of internet portals has also influenced the choice of topics. Since the cost of advertising depends on the number of visits to a website, the editors selected the content to maximise the number of such visits. This practice takes two basic forms. The first are texts of questionable journalistic value with catchy titles. Their topics are very diverse; they may refer to celebrities, contain health advice or take the form of rankings. The second form is the posting of large photo galleries on portals, each of which is separately published and requires a visit to a new page.

6 These titles include Dziennik Bałtycki, Dziennik Łódzki, Dziennik Zachodni, Gazeta Krakowska, Głos Wielkopolski, Gazeta Wrocławska, Polska Metropolia Warszawska, Express Bydgoski, Nowości Dziennik Toruński, Express Ilustrowany, Kurier Lubelski, Gazeta Pomorska, Gazeta Lubuska, Dziennik Polski, Kurier Poranny, Gazeta Współczesna, Nowa Trybuna Opolska, Echo Dnia, Gazeta codzienna Nowiny, Głos Dziennik Pomorza.

7 See more at [Polska Press website](http://Polska Press website).

8 Wirtualne media, „Gazeta Pomorska” liderem sprzedaży w III kwartale, „Polska Metropolia Warszawska” na czele e-wydań.

9 Press.pl, [Mediapanel: w marcu Naszemiasto.pl liderem zestawienia serwisów regionalnych](http://Mediapanel: w marcu Naszemiasto.pl liderem zestawienia serwisów regionalnych), data for March 2023.

10 Polskie Badania Czytelnictwa [Polish Reading Survey], [Ogólnopolskie badania czytelnictwa prasy. Prezentacja danych za okres kwiecień 2022-marzec 2023](http://Ogólnopolskie badania czytelnictwa prasy. Prezentacja danych za okres kwiecień 2022-marzec 2023).

11 Grand Press, [Nominowani do Grand Press Digital 2018](http://Nominowani do Grand Press Digital 2018).



In contrast to paper editions, web editions do not have a specific number of pages; their scope is basically unlimited. This and the desire to increase the number of hits on the website has led to the frequent publication of content that is not very informative. An anecdotal example of this phenomenon is a two-sentence article published on the Gazeta Wroclawska website in 2010: “Today, police officers received a report that a group of men were drinking alcohol in a square in one of Wrocław’s parks. When the officers arrived at the scene, it turned out that no one was there.”<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, Polska Press newspapers also publish longer articles that are the result of a lengthy and thorough collection of material or even journalistic investigations. Nowa Trybuna Opolska uncovered the so-called “City Hall Affair”, in which, among others, the mayor and deputy mayor of a city accepted bribes on a large scale in 2001-2002, which is considered one of the biggest corruption scandals in Polish local government.<sup>13</sup>

## **1.2. The “repolonisation” of the media and the purchase of Polska Press by PKN Orlen**

In the past, the problem of collective ownership of regional media by foreign capital has been discussed time and again by media scholars, journalists and politicians. However, it was not until the end of 2015 and the coming into office of the United Right government that the issue of “repolonising the media” moved to the top of the political agenda. Representatives of the ruling majority have repeatedly voiced their criticism of the “excessive media monopoly” in the press market, especially in the news media, and have announced measures (mainly changes in the law) that would lead to an unbundling of media ownership.<sup>14</sup> The need for “repolonisation” of the media also arose from the alleged attempts of the German owners to influence Polish public opinion.<sup>15</sup>

The first reports of a planned takeover of Polska Press by government-affiliated companies surfaced as early as 2016, when Gazeta Wyborcza informed that Polska Press could be taken over by PKO BP bank.<sup>16</sup> In the following years, the media also reported on the possible takeover of other private media, including TVN. In autumn 2020, The Economist reported that PKN Orlen, a multi-industry conglomerate primarily involved in refinery production and fuel distribution, 49.90% of whose shares are owned by the State Treasury, was in talks to acquire Polska Press.<sup>17</sup> Shortly afterwards, in December 2020, Verlagsgruppe Passau signed a preliminary agreement for the purchase of Polska Press Group by PKN Orlen.

12 Gazeta Wroclawska, [Wrocław: libacja na skwerku](#) [Wrocław: drunkenness at a square].

13 Drosik A. [Media regionalne na straży praworządności](#). Rola „Nowej Trybuny Opolskiej” w ujawnieniu „Afery Ratuszowej”, Academia.eu.

14 Money.pl, [Repolonizacja mediów. Sellin: “wczesna jesienia projekt ustawy dekoncentracyjnej”](#) [Media repolonisation. Sellin: “a deconcentration bill will be proposed in early autumn”]; Polskie Radio.pl, [Jarosław Sellin: na razie nie podejmujemy tematu repolonizacji mediów](#) [Jarosław Sellin: for now, we are not addressing the topic of media repolonisation]; Onet.pl, [Sellin: projekt repolonizacji mediów dotyczy właścicieli mediów](#) [Sellin: the media repolonisation project concerns media owners]; Interia, [Suski o repolonizacji mediów: Rząd musi dbać, by społeczeństwo było informowane rzetelnie](#) [Suski on the media repolonisation: Government must ensure that the public is informed with integrity].

15 See, for example, Fakt.pl, [Posłanka PiS: wprowadziłabym jednowładztwo Jarosława Kaczyńskiego](#) [Law and Justice MP: I would introduce the one-man rule of Jarosław Kaczyński].

16 Czuchnowski W. “[Powstanie koncern prasowy PiS? ‘Padły słowa, że trzeba kupić Fakt, ale to był tylko taki żart...’](#)” [A Law and Justice press conglomerate in the making? “There was talk of having to buy Fakt, but it was just a kind of joke...”], wyborcza.pl.

17 The Economist, [“Poland’s ruling party may clobber independent media”](#).

The proposed transaction was the object of proceedings before the President of the Office of Competition and Consumer Protection (OCCP), who authorised the concentration in February 2021. In the grounds for his decision, the President of the OCCP pointed out that the concentration would not lead to a significant restriction of competition in any of the relevant markets of the parties to the transaction, including the newspaper printing market. The decision enabled the purchase, which took place on 1 March 2021.

The Ombudsman appealed against this decision and sought its annulment. The Ombudsman submitted that the analysis of the admissibility of the concentration did not address the fundamental function of the press, which, in exercising the right to freedom of expression (Article 14 of the Constitution), implements the citizens' right to reliable information, the openness of public life and public scrutiny and criticism. In adopting the contested decision, the President of the OCCP did not consider whether the concentration would lead to an unreasonable restriction of the freedom of the press, although the President is required by law to take into account all circumstances affecting the protected interests of consumers.

The Ombudsman also invoked Article 20 of the Constitution, according to which a market economy based on private property is the foundation of the economic system of the Republic of Poland. Contrary to this article, the authorisation of the concentration promotes the increase of state intervention and state property rights in the economy.

The Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights also submitted its written observations to the Court in the proceedings initiated by the Ombudsman's appeal. In the observations, the HFHR stressed the need to take into account the specificities of the media market and the products offered in that market. The Foundation pointed out that a sound analysis of a concentration of this kind requires consideration of its impact on the diversity of information and ideas available in the social communication media market.<sup>18</sup>

The Ombudsman's appeal was dismissed by the Court of Competition and Consumer Protection at the Regional Court in Warsaw. The court held that the grounds for assessing a concentration authorisation under the Competition Act<sup>19</sup> do not include non-economic factors such as media pluralism which therefore cannot be taken into account in concentration proceedings.

During the court proceedings, despite the decision to suspend the implementation of the decision of the President of the OCCP, PKN Orlen took steps in relation to its ownership and made personnel changes in the management board of Polska Press. For example, Dorota Kania, a right-wing journalist who previously worked for Gazeta Polska Codziennie and Telewizja Republika, among others, was appointed to the board in April 2021.<sup>20</sup>

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18 [Opinia Przyjaciela Sądu HFPC w sprawie z odwołania RPO przeciwko Prezesowi UOKiK o wydanie zgody na koncentrację rozpatrywanej przez Sąd Okręgowy w Warszawie Sąd Ochrony Konkurencji i Konsumentów](#) [An amicus curiae brief in the case of the Ombudsman's appeal against the concentration authorisation of the President of the Office for Competition and Consumer Protection heard by the the Court of Competition and Consumer Protection at the Regional Court in Warsaw].

19 The Act of 16 February 2007 on competition and consumer protection, a uniform text, Journal of Laws of 2021, item 275, as amended.

20 [Polskie Radio24.pl, Dorota Kania członkiem zarządu Polska Press.](#)

## 2. Polska Press before the takeover by PKN Orlen

In the first part of the interviews, the interviewees were asked about their experience of working in Polska Press outlets before December 2020, i.e. the beginning of the takeover process by PKN Orlen. The average length of employment at Polska Press for the interviewees was 18 years (see more Appendix 1 – Methodology), and thus they had a broad view of the situation and changing practices on the press market. In this respect, the interviews focused on issues related to the conditions of employment and work in the regional media, the assessment of journalistic freedom and the cooperation of the outlets with other entities, including advertisers. The vast majority of the interviewees, when sharing their experiences, referred to the situation in their editorial offices, without having in-depth knowledge of the situation in other newspapers published by Polska Press.

### 2.1. Employment and remuneration

Before the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen, one of the significant problems highlighted by journalists was the conditions of employment and remuneration.

A significant number of the interviewees were employed on an employment contract, which was not a standard in all editorial offices. At the same time, some of the interviewees indicated that they had to wait rather long for an employment contract to be offered to them – they often worked under civil-law contracts before concluding an employment contract. One of the interviewees stated that the offer of a full-time employment contract was described as a “dream”. Employment contracts were offered primarily to journalists, while people employed in other positions, e.g. photographers, worked under civil law contracts or contracts with a self-employed person.

*It was free-for-all in terms of contracts, because many people worked under mandate contracts and whenever the time came to convert such contracts into employment contracts, it was either impossible to do so or such a person was let go.*

*I had the impression that when I was finally given an employment contract [after 10 years of work – editor’s note.] it was so both anticipated and earned. I felt when I got it that I really deserved it.*

However, the issue of the basis of employment, despite being pointed out repeatedly in interviews, was not regarded as the biggest problem. Some of the interviewees stressed that working under civil-law contracts allowed them greater flexibility in terms of managing their time and responsibilities, but on the other hand, it was associated with a lack of security, e.g. no social insurance, no overtime compensation and no tracking of time spent at work.

*(Being employed on a mandate contract - ed.) on the one hand, I didn’t have any sense of somehow being grounded and a sense of security (...) And I keep telling myself that it’s because I wanted to, but the truth is that if I had fallen out of the loop, well, there’s no telling if I would still have something to fight for in the next few years.*

However, the question of pay itself was more important than the basis of employment. The interviewees' earnings varied depending on their employment status and position as well as the editorial office itself. In the last year before the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen, earnings among the interviewees were quite spread out – in the interviews only some people specified exactly how much they had earned, but this information shows that in the group participating in the study the earnings ranged from PLN 2,300 net to just under PLN 10,000 net, with these highest salaries being paid primarily to editorial leadership. The editors-in-chief and their deputies participating in the study admitted that they had earned better and more than line journalists.

*There were also huge [pay] disparities within the conglomerate itself, which we learned about (...) when the salary brackets were revealed, so salary brackets for different positions were shown and we quickly learned that we were at the bottom of these brackets (...) in the same positions.*

Some of the interviewees highlighted that instead of a fixed and adequate monthly salary, a basic, fairly low salary was most often offered, on supplemented by bonuses, for example, lineage, i.e. payment by the line. At the same time, one of the interviewees pointed out that though in her editorial office the lineage payment system was favourable (the more a journalist wrote, the more they were paid), „if a journalist really wrote too much, that is above the limit of lines set for lineage payments in the budget, that extra portion of their salary was slashed”, which involved the risk that some of the work of journalists might not be properly compensated. In some editorial offices another additional element of remuneration was also awards given for the most popular articles with most views, though these awards were not very high (e.g., several hundred zloty per month).

The problem of low salaries was often compensated by, on the one hand, a good, close working atmosphere as cited by interviewees, and on the other hand the possibility of applying for salary bonuses or prizes awarded by editors-in-chief, as claimed by few respondents.

*There is a myth that Polska Press pays a pittance. They pay a pittance to those who agree to this.*

One interviewee also brought up a case of unequal pay within a team, which could result from, for example, discretionary decisions taken by management.

*A colleague in my department, in a situation where we had an identical contract and identical responsibilities was getting PLN 200 more than me – I had the feeling that it was because the management liked him more.*

According to most interviewees earnings were low, especially when considering the workload and working time (which in some cases included working at weekends or more than 8 hours a day). With that said, there were few editorial offices, as mentioned by respondents, that made sure that overtime and weekend work was properly accounted for, but this was not standard practice in all editorial offices.



In addition, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, salaries in editorial offices were reduced by 20%<sup>21</sup> starting in March 2020, which was quite negatively received by interviewees. Especially since, as claimed by some respondents, the reduction in salary did not entail a reduction in working time. A similar pay drop for the duration of the pandemic was also applied by some other newspapers.

*So with this 80%, of course, for some in our editorial team it probably didn't mean that much, some small sacrifices, but for me it was already starting to look bad, because I was tight for money, I had enough to buy food, but once you added all the expenses, it was already scarce. Also, since 2020, it's hard to talk about stability, I'm not saying that I felt like the ground was being removed from under my feet, but it was unpleasant.*

*It's not for real that you work 80% of the time. Well, you can't do that. Many people worked 100%. People felt exploited, especially journalists, because the beginning of the pandemic, for many journalists, was indeed a period of such extremely intense work.*

*From a financial perspective, working in regional media was more of an activity for enthusiasts and hobbyists.*

In many cases, a lack of pay rises was explained by the poor financial situation of the company, insufficient profits from advertising or budget cuts in the editorial office imposed by the management board of Polska Press. However, according to the respondents, the employed journalists did not get a full picture of the financial situation of the company. In addition, former editors-in-chief participating in the study indicated that the pressure to keep the newspaper profitable and minimise losses increased every year.

*The part of the year when budgets were made was the most dramatic time in the life of every editor-in-chief. Assumptions were always made that there would be a budget deficit and you had to bring it to minus 5-7%. This involved pay cuts as well as employment cuts.*

*(...) every year in September there were those famous budget cuts. Perhaps it was simply decided that we didn't need that many journalists, that [their salaries] can be cut and duties increased.*

The staff reductions were, in some cases, of a very significant proportion – some interviewees stated that for the past fifteen or so years, editorial offices had employed fewer and fewer people every year. The staff reductions had to do not only with the company's financial situation, but also with the growth of the newspaper's online editions, for which a smaller team was needed than to run the paper edition, which involves additional employees for, among other things, breaking and typesetting. Some interviewees also stressed a decline in interest in working in regional media outlets that has been intensifying over the last few years.

*In fact, few experienced or skilled people wanted to come, we were hiring students.*

*A long time ago, it was just (...) the door did not close, people came in because they wanted to write so much and get an internship in some editorial office, it was a great honour (...) Whereas now I have to say with regret that we literally have 2 or 3 resumes for a whole year.*

21 See also Kowalski J. Polska Press Grupa obniży wynagrodzenia o 20 proc., a nie w zależności od zarobków. Część pracowników na postojowym [Polska Press Group will cut salaries by 20%, not depending on earnings. Some employees furloughed], Wirtualne Media.

These respondents believe that the declining interest in working in regional media is due, among other things, to low salaries, especially compared to the required workload, the lack of employment contracts, irregular working hours of more than eight hours per day, and the long wait for a promotion or salary increase.

*When they are 27-28 years old, they start thinking about starting a family,... and they begin to wonder why they earn so little. They started coming then, they wanted raises (...), young people, brave people, (...) Polska Press was not able to live up to these expectations, as simple as that. As a result, very often they transitioned to smaller newspapers, where they earned more.*

Interestingly, some interviewees were quite critical of younger people's expectations regarding employment conditions and saw such attitudes as demanding.

*And the same in terms of earnings: they want very big money at the start, which – I say – was never possible in our industry. Everyone had always this understanding that you start at a certain level, but once you get some experience, your salary should grow, or there should be raises, just like that. And often young people just don't get it.*

Nevertheless, some of the interviewees stressed excessive rotation in editorial teams, which affects the quality of work and does not ensure the continuity of the editorial work. As follows from the observations of these interviewees, young people leave editorial offices before they learn the trade and are replaced by newcomers who lack the right skill set. At the same time, older and experienced journalists are retiring.

*At the moment there are few left of those who taught me the profession. (...) Professionals have left, and you can see that. In the department where I worked, no one works anymore, and only one person left because they retired, the rest just left that department. (...) I do not know if this is due to a lack of skills, laziness or sloppiness, but I can't imagine how you can publish an article that is badly written.*

*And there was place in the editorial office for young people – who, of course, didn't make much money, but [were there] as collaborators, on a mandate contract and so on – they wrote, learned the craft, and they seamlessly took the place of journalists. But it continued to disappear until at some point the role of a freelance collaborator or an intern virtually evaporated from such editorial offices.*

On the other hand, some of the interviewees stated that the motivation of individual people for whom the internship in a particular editorial office was an important part of their professional career also played an important role.

*Quite a number of people came by and often our newspaper was a stepping stone to other editorial offices.*

All these factors – Polska Press’s financial situation, the need to cut costs and reduce jobs, and staff turnover in editorial teams – have contributed to the opinion that working conditions at Polska Press are quite difficult.

*Polska Press has acquired such an image as a cost-cutting company that does not prioritise employees and work comfort, and the company is not particularly interested in that.*

## **2.2. Atmosphere in the editorial office**

Despite the emerging critical assessments of conditions of employment and salaries in the newspapers of Polska Press, the respondents were mostly quite enthusiastic when asked about the atmosphere in the editorial office and cooperation within the team.

*All these years we had a great team – we were aware that we were in the same boat and we were very friendly to each other, helpful and very often someone helped someone (...) I must say that most people stayed in this job because of the people, certainly not because of the finances.*

At the same time, the respondents also pointed out that the working atmosphere in editorial offices has changed in recent years – it has been influenced by factors related to changes in ownership and corporate policy, increased workload and remote working in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Subsequent changes in ownership of regional media have led to changes in editorial management – primarily a greater emphasis on developing online editions of newspapers and, just as frequently, budget cuts and staff reductions. Some interviewees pointed to the latter area as one of the factors that significantly changed the atmosphere in the editorial office. People employed on average for about ten years in editorial offices stated that the atmosphere when they started work was often familiar and very friendly, and that they worked in quite large teams. Over time, however, the teams became smaller (journalists either left for better-paying jobs or were fired), which had a negative impact on working conditions – journalists emphasised the work overload and, to some extent, the breakdown of relationships within the editorial team.

As for the changes in the company’s policy that affected the atmosphere in the editorial office, two factors played an important role – the emphasis on profit (including the number of items certain articles were viewed and the reduction of staff while increasing responsibilities) and the company’s financial situation.

In extreme cases, interviewees pointed to instances that they believed constituted or came close to bullying behaviour or violations of employee rights, for example, in the form of excessive pressure to achieve certain results:

*It happened that I tried to refer a young intern, a very talented girl, to this girl’s department (who was known in the editorial office for addressing her co-workers rudely – ed.). And she then somehow confided in me that she can’t stand it there because she’s under such pressure to produce results. In addition, the manager addresses her in the wrong way. At that time, I intervened with the then editor-in-chief, who was fascinated by this girl because she delivered results for him.*

*It was harassment [of the journalist – editor’s note], who (...) got e-mails from (...) or was called and told how to behave in various situations, which actually violated the press law, the general code of ethics of journalism. It was pressure, for example, to publish some advertisements.*

forcing the taking of sick leave:

*And in connection with these cuts (...) my superiors at the time declared that my pregnancy – their words- was a real godsend. And they wanted me to take sick leave as soon as possible, even though I felt fine.*

or expectations of working beyond working hours:

*We felt like hamsters on a wheel.*

*We worked from Monday to Sunday plus holidays. I felt that in terms of valuing an employee, it was such a free-for-all – you were given new tasks, you were supposed to manage them, and then if you failed to manage a certain event, you were held accountable for it. Sometimes you can’t do everything, and, in this context, there have just been some unpleasant situations.*

On the other hand, some respondents think that bullying behaviour is a normal part of editorial work.

*Bullying is a normal practice (...) it always depended on the charisma pf the publisher, what kind of texts they wanted and how they would edit them, and some just could not stand it.*

*It is a common belief that if a superior has certain expectations they bully [employees].*

*If someone yells at someone, that’s normal in editorial offices.*

Particularly troubling were the cases in which interviewees indicated that the situation in the editorial office and working conditions had a destructive effect on their mental health. Two of the respondents had such serious problems that – after the takeover of Polska Press by Orlen – they took sick leave. Another interviewee mentioned cases of people who received benefits due to mental problems (depression), and also retired early.

### **2.3. Trade unions**

Trade unions are active in Polska Press media at the nationwide level (i.e. the entire Group) and at the level of individual editorial offices.

Most of the interviewees state that the trade unions in the group were not very active both before and after Orlen’s takeover of Polska Press, had little influence on the editorial work and were not very effective. Several interviewees’ opinions of the unions and their activities were even more critical – two respondents independently described their activities as “a fiction” and another as “a complete flop”. One interviewee linked this negative assessment to the broader problem of low trade union activity in Poland (in contrast to the more developed union culture in other countries). However,



another respondent noted that a trade union operating in a different medium in Poland has more impact. Several interviewees indicated that trade unions at Polska Press were more vibrant in the past (a couple or a dozen years ago).

There were also slightly more positive reviews. Some interviewees reported on the unions' struggle for wage increases. One of the interviewees also pointed out that thanks to the union's activity in his editorial office, he was better informed about the actual financial situation of his newspaper, which helped him when he sought salary increases.

*Before that, we did not even know if we could ask for a raise, because whenever someone asked for a raise, they were told that the newspaper was not selling, that circulation was falling, that people were not buying ads, and that the press was going downhill and that we might not even exist in a few years, so that was the information situation we were kept in for years, well, after we joined the unions, we received more frequent information about the company's results, whether there were losses or profits.*

In general, respondents indicated that there were no major conflicts between the unions and the employer (which other respondents described as a "conciliatory and accommodating attitude toward the employer"). However, there were some tensions related to the formation of unions in individual editorial offices (when the previous owner was still in charge).

*They took us to task, all the journalists, and they were very indignant that we had formed a union behind their backs and that this was a blow to our credibility in general (...) and that it would have a negative impact on our relations because now they would have to handle all matters through the union and we would no longer be able to speak freely and discuss pay raises that had not been made in years.*

For most editorial offices, interviewees indicated that trade unions had few or even very few members. There were exceptions, however: in one editorial office, about half of the journalistic team was reportedly in the union, in two others – the majority of the team, with one editorial office experiencing mass trade union membership after the announcement of Orlen's takeover of Polska Press (incidentally, in another editorial office, a similar idea was conceived after the announcement of the change in ownership, but ultimately not implemented).

One of the interviewees revealed that in his editorial office the trade union objected to the employment of a person from the public media known for extremely harsh statements, also critical of the editorial team in that office (this was after the takeover of Polska Press by Orlen). This was the only reported case of a trade union taking such action.

### 3. Evaluation of journalistic freedom before the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen

The prevailing opinion among the interviewees was that, until the takeover of Polska Press by Orlen, freedom of journalistic activity was, in principle, unrestricted.

*Before Orlen came along, journalists could write about what they considered necessary and right, that is, act according to the laws of this profession, that is, explain, try to explain, reality. No one ever told us how to write.*

The interviewees mainly paid attention to the freedom in the selection of topics, interviewees and shaping the editorial line. For the most part, respondents never encountered interventions in prepared texts (except for the correction of obvious errors and linguistic revision of the text).

The interviewees also highlighted that there was rarely any interaction between the management of their newspapers and the journalists themselves. In this regard, they emphasised a fairly high degree of freedom of action and no direct instructions.

*This is what I explain to people when there are allegations these newspapers were managed by Germans. [The previous owners – ed.] were even afraid to meet with journalists, they were even afraid to talk about the newspaper at all (...) when I sometimes talked to the previous owners and they started talking about the newspaper, then they apologized to me that they even spoke about it.*

The interviewees also pointed to two important phenomena that significantly influenced the freedom of journalistic activity – the relationship with advertisers and the pressure to achieve the required rates of text views in online editions.

*All these accusations that we were obeying some orders coming from Germany, the German raison d'état and so on, or that some German censor was dictating to journalists what to write, was an obvious nonsense that only people addicted to politics could tell. Because there were no such commitments. The only commitment of all employees of the company was to work towards maximizing its profits [...] there were no political masters, but there were business masters.*

As for the relationship with advertisers, while respondents often stressed their independence in this area, there were also statements indicating that at work they had to take into account “a business interest of the editorial office” and stay within the boundaries of that interest. In practice, this, in turn, meant, among other things, the publication of sponsored texts (although in this case it was emphasised that this did not impair the newspaper’s information function), special supplements, or the preparation of special competitions or rankings by the newspaper.

Another major issue was whether to restrict the selection of certain topics if those topics might cast a major advertiser or other entity important to the newspaper’s business interests in an unfavourable light. In one case, a respondent pointed to the prevalence of self-censorship, stating that the criteria

for evaluating topics that should not be reported on were „transparent, clear, and evident to everyone” – the censorship extended to texts about one of the companies that played an important role in the distribution of the newspaper in question in the region. The same respondent admitted that this practice was abandoned after some time and after the change of the editor-in-chief (but before the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen in 2020).

With regard to the media’s relations with advertisers, the attitude of the editors-in-chief played an important role – respondents from various editorial offices pointed out that while they were aware of the fact that advertisements were an important source of revenue for the newspaper, as long as they had the support of the editors-in-chief, they enjoyed full freedom of action. One of the interviewees gave as an example a text describing a situation in the municipal office that resulted in the city withdrawing a newspaper insert it had sponsored.

*This is a situation in my unfortunate journalistic career that allows me to say how much a text costs (...) the editor-in-chief behaved wonderfully, but when I clashed with colleagues from the advertising office in the corridor I saw blood in their eyes.*

A former editor-in-chief, on the other hand, indicated that one factor that strongly favoured maintaining independence in journalistic work was his newspaper’s established position in the regional market.

*We wrote critical articles about big advertisers (...), but we were never called to account if an advertiser suddenly withdrew his ads after our critical article, that was due to our strong position (...) Politicians, local government officials or big businessmen had to count on us.*

The most serious threat to journalistic freedom, however, has been the pressure to focus on online newspaper editions based on the model of maximising page views and advertising revenue. Interviewees pointed out that the underlying cause of the process was the decline in newspaper readership and the company’s policy to balance the costs of maintaining print editions with profits from online editions, which primarily include advertising.

*It was a matter of directing the readers of the paper editions to the Internet (...) this process is still going on today, the old „paper” brands do not earn as much as they could because they have this burden of paper editions (...) and this process is not yet finished, i.e. the money spent on the paper editions is not recouped by the profits on the Internet (...) Of course, it must also be added that Polska Press has never been serious about subscriptions.*

The corporation’s policy of insisting on maximising article views contributed to the selection of scandalous, frivolous topics and promoted publications that were more attention-grabbing, including those with photos or videos more than in-depth analysis.

*Our superiors told us to make click-bait topics (...) everyone had to make such junk information about health, celebrities, anything that would generate clicks.*

*The only obligation of all employees was to work toward maximising the company's profits (...) journalists had to learn how to work on the Internet, but they were held accountable for how many views or users their texts brought and based on this, their effectiveness was measured. Fortunately, not all of them, but quite a lot.*

*This later led to such a sick situation that purely journalistic texts that involved a lot of work, even some reportages where you were on the road for a day, were not attractive enough for an online edition, so they were placed somewhere low, and even if they had been placed higher, they would have generated, say, I don't know, 300,000 hits, and that was it.*

Nearly half of the interviewees indicated that their editorial offices paid attention to achieving adequate pageview rates and site visits. In individual editorial offices, journalists received certain financial rewards (usually one hundred to several hundred zloty per month) for producing material with the highest number of views. The respondents, who work in different editorial offices, noted that depending on the financial situation of the respective newspaper or the situation on the regional market the pressure to achieve adequate pageview rates varied. In some editorial offices, it was the main factor that even affected the choice of topics, while journalists employed in other editorial offices admitted that they were aware of the need to achieve such rates, but did not face pressure and consequences if they were not achieved.

*No, we were not held to account for the number of views, but if your pageviews were higher in a given month than before, you could get a bonus.*

Under these conditions, the respondents took on different work organisation approaches. Some interviewees claimed that they had not taken these requirements into consideration and still received a bonus for engaging or particularly interesting texts.

*Previously, the editor-in-chief had his prize pool and this was done in different ways – for example, managing editors submitted to them the texts that were liked the most. It lasted for years. For me, it was a pretty big cash injection of money, because in my many years of work, there were only a few months when I did not get the award at all. Then, as the owner [PKN Orlen – editor's note] changed, the system [of awards for the most engaging texts – editor's note] began to be negotiated (...), I immediately decided that I simply did not care about bonuses, I preferred to do my job rather than fight.*

Others, on the other hand, indicated that they covered more engaging topics in the first place, in order to have room for more in-depth after such texts were produced.

*There was always a lot of work and they kept us in line with these pageviews – I tried to do it this way that I wrote one text that I knew would attract a lot of clicks, and then I did my own thing.*



Other journalists, in those click-focused editorial offices, succumbed to those recommendations:

*We are writing, excuse my French, about bullshit. Serious, major journalistic work either is beyond the reach of journalists or is pointless because if someone is to spend many months conducting a journalistic investigation then they just let go (...) there were many people who pursued these goals, i.e. views.*

At the same time, questions about the topics covered by newspapers of Polska Press provoked quite critical comments among the interviewees regarding the general condition of journalism at the regional level. One of the main problems in this area was the increasingly common practice of limiting the scope of coverage to reports from press conferences, such as those held by municipal or provincial offices. Journalists participating in the study, especially those with more than 15 years of experience, pointed out that press articles are mainly reports of press conferences, which limits the possibility of following the topics chosen by journalists.

*Such a practice was developed to flood journalists with a wealth of information that the city wants to brag about propagandistically. That's why, more or less since 2011, we have had 4-6 press conferences a day, well, and I have to say that the media market has bought it, because there are no longer journalists out there looking for information of the kind that the local government doesn't want to brag about.*

*– Do you remember the reactions to the topics planned by journalists, for example?*

*– They differed, it depends (...) (ideas to – ed.) cover official announcements were criticised.*

## 4. Orlen's takeover of Polska Press

On 7 December 2023 PKN Orlen announced that it had entered into a preliminary agreement for the sale of Polska Press.<sup>22</sup> Some of the interviewees were not surprised by this information, since, as some said, unofficial information about the takeover of Polska Press by a Polish state-owned company had been known for several years. Some of the interviewees linked these rumours to announcements of politicians proclaiming the “repolonisation of the media” (see point 1.2. The “repolonisation” of the media and the purchase of Polska Press by PKN Orlen).

The interviewees, however, did not know how to interpret the rumours. On the one hand, one respondent noted that: „we said, look, they are not idiots, they are not going to smash the hen that lays golden eggs – golden eggs is perhaps an exaggeration, but a profitable company nonetheless”, but on the other hand, they pointed out that „the press in Poland is barely breathing, so the Germans will want to get rid of it”. Rumours about a possible ownership takeover were received with varying attitudes. Some respondents “did not take them seriously” or “denied the possibility”, but on the other hand, they were afraid of these changes, because “everyone knew who would come”. According to some interviewees, information about a possible change in ownership was met with some hope „to improve employment conditions”.

The interviewees learned about the preliminary sales agreement in December 2020 through various means. Some former editors-in-chief participating in the study were informed of this change at a meeting of Polska Press's editors-in-chief and managers with the company's management board. The rest of the journalists mostly learned about the change from the media. The vast majority of the interviewees expected significant changes in the work of the editorial office as soon as they learned about the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen.

### 4.1. Changes in the positions of editors-in-chief

The changes associated with PKN Orlen's takeover of Polska Press were staggered. In the first period (from December 2020 to the end of March 2021), the interviewees did not notice any major changes in the operation of their editorial offices. It was only with the change of the management board of Polska Press in March 2021 that numerous staffing changes were implemented.

In March 2021, when the purchase of Polska Press by PKN Orlen was completed, the first changes in the management board were announced. Dorota Kania, a right-wing journalist previously associated with *Gazeta Polska Codziennie* and *Telewizja Republika*, among other titles, was appointed to the board. After that between April and June 2022 there was a major reshuffling of editors-in-chief positions. In 14 editorial offices of Polska Press there were personnel changes in the positions of editors-in-chief. In some cases, these changes were made again in the following year. The information provided by the interviewees paint a fairly coherent picture of how changes were made in the positions of editors-in-chief.

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<sup>22</sup> Wirtualne Media, [Orlen za 120 mln zł kupuje Polska Press. “Rusza repolonizacja mediów”](#) [Orlen buys Polska Press for PLN 120 million. “Media repolonisation is underway”].

Former editors-in-chief participating in the study reported meetings with Dorota Kania, during which the issue of terminating [their] employment contracts was discussed. They indicated that they decided to terminate their employment contract by mutual agreement because they did not want to become involved in labour disputes.

*It entered my mind to fight them in court, but (...) I know that an employment court can even bring you back to work, but usually it's a three-month severance pay and goodbye – I preferred to just get it over with. so I accepted the offer and that's how it ended.*

*In short, formally it is an agreement of the parties, but of course, I feel like everyone else that we were just kicked out of the company.*

At the same time, those of the interviewees who considered bringing an action for termination of their employment contract to an employment tribunal admitted that Polska Press offered such favourable terms of termination of the employment relationship at that time that they “did not have it in them to refuse”. The very decision to terminate the employment contract was not thoroughly justified by Polska Press.

*[Dorota Kania – editor's note] came and says that she values me very much, I have great results – I actually had (...) so I was so satisfied that once they let me go, they won't be able to tell me that I gave them reasons, because that can always be explained. She came and said that she valued me, and so on, but that there was some situation and that she had to discharge me from this position (...) Dorota Kania didn't give any specific reason for ending the cooperation, because she didn't have any either. She said something along the lines of “such a historical necessity”.*

*[Dorota Kania – editor's note] used the phrase that she had a different vision [regarding the newspaper – editor's note], but we didn't talk about this vision, so it made me laugh that she had a different vision, because I didn't even know what vision she had.*

*We knew that this is how the story twisted and this is how it must happen.*

In some cases, interviewees additionally indicated that changes in the positions of editors-in-chief may also have been motivated by political interests.

*[selection of new editors-in-chief – editor's note] such talks weren't conducted in the company's statutory bodies, but between local politicians and [the party leadership].*

*And it was rather talked about people here [in this editorial office] that were connected with the Law and Justice party, and he kind of came out of nowhere. [...] A friendly, nice guy, it's just that no one saw his texts. He seemingly had something to do with journalism, but I have never heard of him working in this profession.*

*I was told that the selection resembled dividing a cake and a piece of the cake had to go to the circle associated with Gazeta Polska, a piece of cake, to the milieu linked to a specific political faction, another piece to a different political faction of the United Right, but these were mostly journalists or people associated in some way with the media. Sometimes journalists with no experience.*

According to some interviewees, the worldview presented by new editors-in-chief was also important.

*The new editor-in-chief introduced himself to us as a, extremely hardcore right-wing Catholic.*

Moreover, some interviewees voiced reservations about the managerial competence of new editors-in-chief. Specifically, they highlighted that new editors-in-chief were usually people who had no previous experience in managing teams and, in most cases, had little journalistic experience.

*He was a good journalist, had knowledge, but he never worked in the press. He's also the kind of man that you can discuss anything with, only little came of it (...) he couldn't manage people, I think he still has a problem with that. I don't know if it didn't interest him, but somehow he didn't dig too much into how the newspaper works.*

*When word came out that he would work for us [as editor-in-chief – editor's note], his former colleague patted me on the shoulder and said with sadness „well, now you will see”.*

*They (the new editor-in-chief and deputy editor-in-chief) didn't know anything about how we work here, how to publish a newspaper and weeklies to maintain the same quality as we had before.*

Some interviewees pointed out that their unfavourable assessment of the new editors-in-chief may have been related to their outrage over the changes in the position, but the survey simultaneously acknowledged that their fears were confirmed.

*We talked that this is a person who can't write and who wouldn't write anything on his own, so from the beginning we saw the editor-in-chief as someone who was forced upon us and who is not where he belongs. Maybe it was also a matter of us being prejudiced, that we already thought that it would be bad, but a lot of this turned out to be true really.*

Some of the surveyed editors-in-chief were asked to work during their notice period and induct their successors. In these cases, interviewees described the new editors-in-chief as “complete newbies” who did not have relevant experience in editorial management.

*[The new editor-in-chief] sat and learned how to run the editorial meeting, because he had never seen anything like it.*

*(...), a complete greenhorn, appeared, he had absolutely no experience in leading any team. (...) He had little to do with the press, and certainly nothing in a managerial capacity. (...) He had to learn a lot, so the previous editor-in-chief was asked to stay for a month until his successor completes his onboarding.*

Interviewees pointed out that the new editors-in-chief tried, at least for a while, to keep the existing team together in order to keep the editorial team working.

*In [my city] it [the changes in the editorial team – editor's note] didn't happen, because the [new] editor-in-chief realised very quickly that he simply did not have any technical knowledge of how to run an editorial team, because it involved a certain amount of organisational and technical expertise, and so on.*

In some editorial offices, editors-in-chief had already been changed twice since Polska Press was taken over by PKN Orlen. In such cases, the first changes in these leadership positions usually took place in the first half of 2021.

*They probably had no one to put in, they chose an average journalist but was a good friend. We were all happy about it.*

Subsequently, after a certain period, these individuals were also dismissed and replaced by new editors-in-chief. According to interviewees, the reasons for the successive changes varied: interviewees suspected that in some editorial offices changes were related to the upcoming elections or that the previous editors-in-chief had proved to be 'too weak' i.e. not critical enough of the opposition, or resulted from the merging of editorial offices into macro-regional organisations.

*They fast-tracked this propaganda and promoted a deputy to the chief's position. They appointed this chief, (...) but he was too soft, so they had him replaced. Because now the elections are coming up and there are other tasks, you have to get up to speed.*

In addition to critical assessments of the new editors-in-chief, some interviewees expressed a favourable view of the new nominees (by that time some of the new editors-in-chief had already been replaced). In this context, the surveyed emphasised the professional competence of the new chief executives, as well as their ability not to antagonise the team and to create a good collaborative atmosphere.

*I had some misgivings, but the editor-in-chief told us after the takeover that there was room here for everyone regardless of their views.*

*I can honestly say that I have a good opinion of my editor-in-chief, because even though we have different views, even though he is extremely right-wing for me, I think he behaves in an honest way first and foremost. This editorial office has a bias imposed by the will of the editor-in-chief, he makes some decisions – for example, we argue whether a topic is interesting or not, and sometimes these arguments have a political undertone – while the publications themselves, for the most part (...), are rather devoid of this political baggage.*

## **4.2. Changes to editorial teams**

In most of the editorial teams the interviewees work (or worked), the most substantial changes occurred during the first year after the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen. Some of the interviewees estimate that between 50% and 80% of the journalists employed at the time of the takeover have left their editorial teams (some of these departures had been previously planned, as described in the sections below). The changes affected all levels all roles – from deputy editors-in-chief, managing editors, reporters and journalists working in online departments.

Those journalists who decided to leave immediately had different motivations. First, according to interviewees, journalists were letting themselves go for “ideology reasons” in protest against a possible change in the newspaper’s editorial line.



*A large number of the journalists left because they could not imagine the possibility of working in an outlet subordinate to a state-owned company, i.e. linked to a political affiliation and a certain narrative.*

As interviewees observed, the journalists who resigned were mainly those with “distinctive views” who no longer “saw the editorial office as a place for themselves”. Equally important factors were the changing atmosphere at work – the changes introduced “created such an atmosphere that you either needed to run away and find a new place or jump right in and really feel at home”, and the fear of the politicisation of the Polska Press media.

*I can't imagine working for a company that is dependent on political affiliation and in a media organisation that is so biased and narrative.*

*There were a lot of journalists who could not conceive of working at all for this political option.*

In most of the cases described, employment was terminated by mutual agreement. However, while the leaving editors-in-chief were offered substantial severance packages, this not always happened with other journalists.

*(One of the former editors-in-chief): I would very much like to be honest about it, also with my colleagues, people were sacked but not thrown under the bus. Whereas, for example, my deputy who, feeling loyal, resigned on the same day, was essentially left with nothing (...) And quite a few journalists left without any extra cushions. This is heroism.*

In several cases described by interviewees, employment was terminated, even by mutual agreement, for other reasons – an interviewee gave the example of a journalist whose contract was terminated because of opinions she had expressed in public. Another interviewee recalled a situation in which a member of the new management board of Polska Press was said to have called the new editorial leadership with instructions to fire two editors and the author of a piece that displeased a ruling majority politician. Also, interviewees observed that termination of employment affected the journalists who dealt with topics deemed “unnecessary”.

*There were no political connections or sentiments. It was just a kind of sober calculation – what else could be cut out here from what is already a stub?*

Two interviewees also felt that the measures taken by the new management were actually intended to force them out of their jobs.

*From the start, when the new editors, the new editor-in-chief and the new deputy editor-in-chief came in, steps were taken to deprive me of my job (...) I lost much of my independence, my work was interfered with more, my pieces were at times censored or pulled out of print (...) This could simply be called mobbing. I was removed from my duties because it was a position too important to be left in the hands of someone with links to previous editors and company management.*

*Then this game of attrition started and people like me either resigned on their own, looked for a new job, and so it was probably best to end things amicably so to avoid getting kicked around with the man and having a disciplinary discharge dragging around afterwards.*

On the other hand, other important factors were the better job offers that some journalists received from e.g. local government newspapers, or a decision to set up their own outlets. In a small number of editorial offices, the process of fundamental changes in the editorial team had already begun before the ownership takeover, and the purchase of Polska Press by PKN Orlen only reinforced this trend.

*People started leaving before the dawn of the Orlen era. When Orlen showed up, things were speeded up, but by the time the cadres inside the company were replaced, more than half of all the departures had already been completed.*

At the same time, new journalists were recruited to senior positions to replace those who left. In this context, decisions regarding the appointment of new people as deputy editors-in-chief, who in some cases handled the day-to-day work of editing teams and introduced changes to these teams, were relevant to the operation of editorial offices. In these cases, it was the work and leadership of the new deputy editors-in-chief that raised the most objections from interviewed journalists.

*The editor-in-chief arrived with his deputy, who immediately became his right-hand man.*

*The new chief is a man who is, let's say, non-threatening. On the other hand, the deputy chief is well-known as a disruptive type, a politically controlled whip.*

*It was after the new editor-in-chief came in that [a person from the editorial team – editor's note] started to explicitly manifest their right-leaning political beliefs and became a deputy editor-in-chief and started to pick the journalists who would produce the kind of content the editor-in-chief wanted.*

Some of the interviewees expressed the view that, while the new editors-in-chief are supposed to be loyal to the new management of Polska Press, the main job of their deputies is to control the new editorial line. Depending on an editorial office, the new editorial line is expected to include, for example, greater representation of national policy topics at the expense of regional topics, a more favourable depiction of ruling party politicians and unsympathetic coverage of the opposition (see section 6, Evaluation of journalistic freedom).

*This [deputy editor-in-chief - editor's note] is the man who is supposed to keep the ruling party out of harm's way.*

*No-one ever questioned the editor-in-chief's decisions. But here it was apparent that the deputy chief was more in control and you could see all the friction and differences between them.*

*The editor-in-chief was less involved in the day-to-day working of the editorial team, he didn't exactly harbour any such censorship tendencies, while the new deputy editor definitely had such ambitions.*

Interviewees also pointed out that, in addition to new managers (see section 4.1, Change of editors-in-chief), some editorial offices have also established collaborative relationships with journalists, often with right-wing views, whose pieces often contain views supportive of the ruling majority and critical of the opposition. Interviewees were critical of this practice, not only because it makes regional newspapers more partisan, but also because the political strife taking place at the level of national politics is transferred to the pages of regional newspapers.

*The politics department, which was basically non-existent before, because political material was prepared by journalists from Warsaw, has been created and staffed with new journalists (...) A couple of columnists who write government-friendly features, two or three columnists-for-hire who do things that journalists from the team I used to lead would never do.*

With increasingly more journalists leaving the Polska Press newspapers, the new management began to hire new people. However, some of the interviewees participating in the survey indicated that, first, there are still not enough new hires to really reduce the workload and, second, there are times when the skills and preparation of these individuals are substandard. In these cases, interviewees mentioned that some of the new staff lacked initiative, had quite poor training and were not able to prepare articles to a high enough standard, while remaining available.

*The word was they don't seem to be from Radio Maryja [an ultra-conservative catholic media organisation] or any of its affiliated journalism higher education institutions. But (...) they copy&paste everything, they can't write on their own.*

*Some blokes who can't put two sentences together but whose views are „correct” have also been hired.*

*There has been no resistance [in the region] also because most of the journalists are young, not yet hardened, without any clearly articulated views. Some self-censor themselves. And unfortunately, sometimes I witness something like that.*

While interviewees accepted that often newly recruited individuals do not necessarily have a sufficiently wide range of experience and relevant qualifications, they pointed out that due to the numerous changes in editorial teams, younger journalists have no one to learn from.

*As far as I know, they have recently hired quite young journalists, rather inexperienced ones (...) later on, we come across these people at conferences, and you can see by the quality of their questions, by the way they write, that no one is guiding them, teaching them how to write, etc. (...) it's really embarrassing to read some things these days.*

### 4.3. Changes in employment conditions

The assessment of news of the potential takeover of Polska Press by Orlen was, to an extent, guided by the rather critical overall assessment of employment conditions, including the salaries at Polska Press (see section 2.1, Employment and remuneration). Some interviewees recalled opinions voiced in their editorial offices that the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen (or by another parent company) could improve the financial situation of the journalists.

Nearly all respondents confirmed minor increases in pay after the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen, ranging from PLN 100 to PLN 500. However, since the salaries at Polska Press were quite low, some interviewees concluded that any improvement in financial conditions was important.

In many editorial offices, the increases granted depended on the amount of pay. In some editorial offices, only people who previously earned the statutory minimum salary received raises. Elsewhere, raises were not awarded to the journalists whose earnings exceeded a certain threshold. Interviewees mentioned that pay rises should be measured against inflation, which reduces their effective weight.

*There were some token raises of a few hundred zlotys, 200-300 zlotys, (...) and that was only for those who earned the least. Also, this was not some money that would change someone's life or living conditions.*

*In fact, the pay has nudged up a bit and I think that is a good description. On the other hand, it's still not the kind of salary that I think would guarantee a carefree life and no worries for the next few months there. I also have this wee feeling that this salary is going up because the minimum wage is going up.*

Some interviewees further indicated that editorial offices had also started to distribute fuel vouchers worth between PLN 400 and PLN 500.

However, the interviewees say that contrary to expectations, the takeover of Polska Press by Orlen has not significantly improved their employment conditions and pay. Apart from noting the absence of significant pay rises, some interviewees commented that no significant changes had been made to the system of employee incentives or the calculation of bonuses for journalists. In this way, as the respondents saw it, the employment system, which relied heavily on employee motivation and commitment without clear criteria for pay rises, has been maintained.

*It was supposed to be 100 times better and it's not, but it's still better than it used to be.*

On the other hand, some of the interviewees acknowledged that the new editors-in-chief paid close attention to the conditions of employment, including, above all, the pay.

*When he [the new editor-in-chief – editor's note] came in, he was appalled, he said he didn't think journalists could at all work in such lousy conditions.*

Furthermore, the changes introduced in some editorial offices went beyond pay rises and included, for example, a reduction of workload or the standardisation of working hours. In one case, a change of office premises was identified as a positive development. Consequently, in some regions where interviewees worked, Polska Press was nevertheless seen as a good company to work for. Journalists are employed in-house, and they have employment contracts, which gives a sense of employment and financial stability.

*It's still a good place to work for those who hang around because people get holiday allowance – a couple of hundred zloty – there is some money in the loan fund, if they want to, they can borrow money from the newspaper at any time. Free vouchers for Christmas.*

One interviewee presented an overall positive assessment of the changes following the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen.

*I think it's a much better workplace despite my concerns about the political aspect of this takeover. I can finally sleep and wake up at normal hours.*

## **5. Evaluation of journalistic freedom after the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen**

Almost all participants in the survey pointed to the deterioration of freedom of journalistic activity after the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen and the introduction of new management in the editorial offices.

First, some of the respondents to the survey pointed out that various practices have emerged in some editorial offices to present certain issues, mostly related to government policies, in a way favourable to the ruling majority.

*I know that this information has just come up, that we know that we cannot write about certain issues. We going to write good things about PiS [the Law and Justice party] (...).*

*At the [first] editorial meeting after the takeover, the new editor-in-chief of the newspaper said bluntly: “We are not attacking the government”.*

In this context, journalists participating in the study reported cases where journalistic freedom was restricted in the production of material on political issues. In such situations, some of the interviewees pointed out that they were instructed not to discuss the issues in question or that political topics were assigned to people whom the new leadership trusted.

*We were immediately told not to get involved in political reporting under any circumstances, as we were in local affairs. It is difficult to write a journalistic text on any subject without references to current politics, and so I felt having my hand a bit tied right away.*



*You mentioned that [a person from the new management board of Polska Press – editor’s note] called and said what should you write about at that moment? No, she wasn’t talking about what to write about at the time, just who was supposed to do the writing.*

*Let’s say there’s a pothole in a road and we’re not going to mention the fact that there’s no money to maintain the road, because that’s getting political.*

*That’s when the self-censorship kicked in and everyone was very careful, because (...) it’s safer to write just about that pothole [without giving a background] and stay out of trouble.*

Moreover, the practice of presenting a favourable view of the government’s actions in press materials included instances of preparing lists of politicians associated with the United Right whom the journalists should interview. In some cases, these instructions were also accompanied by lists of questions to be asked during interviews with PIS politicians compiled by new editors-in-chief (“My colleague was given a list of questions to ask so that he wouldn’t bother to think about the questions anymore”). Interviewees also pointed to examples of interferences in the published material aimed at giving appropriate prominence to the participation of a politician of the ruling majority in, for example, a particular event or ceremony held in the region.

*The first conflict was, in general, a curiosity, and related to [a Law and Justice MP from the region - editor’s note](...) [The Minister - editor’s note] came and held a press conference. I already forgot what he said during that conference, we had a reporter there. She prepared a short report, we put it up online with, say, 40 photos from the event. And the editor-in-chief came, although I wasn’t the managing editor at the time, stood over my desk and said “Did you see?” “But what?” “Well, look at that.” He opens up the website for me, there’s a picture of the minister on the website, a title, so I start reading, thinking “Dear God what does this say?”. I haven’t even had time to read the piece and he says “Look at the photo”. “But what about the photo?” “Well, [the PiS MP from the region] is not there, and he invited [the Minister]”. I looked at him and said, “You’ve got to be kidding me!” and he goes like, “What do you mean?”. [I said,] “After all, the minister is the main focus, he is speaking out, he has come here to speak, what do we care about this MP?”. And I forgot about the affair (...) I finished work, went home and got a call from an editor who said “Listen, there’s been a big ruckus. [The editor-in-chief – editor’s note] told me to swap this photo with a photo of the minister with the MP”.*

Interference in the content of articles and pressure on the choice of particular topics also took a more subtle form, with an interviewee pointing out that favouritism in a newspaper’s coverage of the ruling majority also comprised of, for example, excessive promotion of cultural events organised by politicians of the ruling majority or companies linked to such politicians.

*So they don’t actually say that Tusk is bad and PiS is cool, but at the same time, they buy into the PiS propaganda with a silly text about an exhibition (...).*

*In general, marginalizing the opposition and giving a forum to the ruling party, only to PiS, has been a typical way of doing things.*

In this context, a particularly worrying development is the reduction in the media's control function, which was noted in several editorial offices. One of the interviewees recalled what the new editor-in-chief said about their newspaper:

*This is not a medium to make a profit, this is a medium to bring voters to the ballot box (...) We have been bought off by the government, we are a government group, and whoever doesn't like it will be let go.*

*That was one of the first things he [the new editor-in-chief's – editor's note] said at the editorial meeting. "Remember, we do not attack the government" - that was the motto he brought to the newspaper, to the media, which are essentially the fourth estate, that is to say, their job is to check, to keep an eye on the government, among other things.*

Second, interviewees talked about prohibitions on exploring topics and issues that may be related to worldview, e.g. LGBT rights or the situation of refugees.

*[Responding to the proposal of a topic related to the promotion of solidarity with LGBT community – editor's note] The deputy editor-in-chief said that we absolutely would not be promoting LGBT.*

*(When a journalist proposed to explore the topic of anti-LGBT resolutions adopted by local government authorities:) I was told that no, we won't be covering it. It seemed to me that this was a socially, and also politically, important phenomenon that needed to be addressed, so I persisted and started asking around. I heard: "No, because we don't report about such things here". So I gave up.*

*Instructions like that (...) or pulling my interviews or not letting me talk about refugees.*

Restrictions related to the choice of topics also applied to publications on, for example, certain companies, including local government or state-owned companies, including PKN Orlen itself.

*Needless to say, since we are owned by Orlen, it would be weird for us to write about Orlen's odd pricing policy. And in this context, I have mixed feelings, insofar as I realise that you never [undermine] your direct corporate owner (...) but the situation is peculiar because Orlen, after all, is not a private commercial company. While all other media are, or have been, reporting on Obajtek [Orlen's CEO], we have been so timid. To put it mildly.*

*Orlen treats the newspaper like a corporate newsletter.*

Interviewees also pointed to the previously unheard-of instances of interference with the content they produced and of changing the tone of that content or taking it out of print. Some interviewees pointed to the practice of making sweeping changes to the articles so that their tone matched the new editorial line, most often critical of the opposition.

*We laughed until recently that after the editor-in-chief is done with his redacting, some journalists would not recognise their own pieces.*

*I've definitely lost my big independence, there was more meddling with what the current issue should, and shouldn't, cover. There have also been instances of a kind of censorship, for example, of photographs in a piece that was already prepared for publication. Once, in the beginning, the deputy editor-in-chief demanded that an issue be pulled out of print (...) because he didn't like some content, topic-wise. It wasn't about any mistakes, it was about the content that, in his opinion, didn't correspond with the new line the newspaper should follow.*

Some interviewees also pointed out the increasing number of cases where politicians, at both local and national levels, were interfering with drafted articles.

*[A journalist was preparing a piece about a municipal company run by a Law and Justice politician - editor's note.] I called this politician (...) he talked to me in such an insolent way, it was quite an uncool conversation. I have the piece published and the next day he called me to complain and also told me that he had already spoken to my editor-in-chief.*

*Well, at one point I got a call from an editor I am on good terms with and he said, "What's going on here"? He said he got a call from the editor-in-chief, outraged because he himself got a call from the provincial governor's spokesperson, complaining that I was picking on the governor, that the topic has nothing to do with the provincial governor at all, and asking what's my business with him. And the editor-in-chief told the editor to read the piece, which was not yet ready, and judge whether I had accidentally scribbled something unwise in there. The editor reassured the chief that everything was accurate and the whole affair seemed to have gone away.*

Interviewees also pointed to a new phenomenon, namely a certain degree of familiarity of certain members of the editorial staff, especially the new management, with local and provincial politicians.

*We have been very frequently visiting provincial governor [X], a member of Law and Justice, so frequently that I felt like we were just living there as if this editorial office had been moved to the provincial governor's headquarters.*

*I know that the right-wing community in general, the party activists – MPs, politicians and so on – treat many regional newspapers like some private fiefdoms. I mean, they can call the editor-in-chief at any time, and if not the editor-in-chief, someone else, put pressure on them, fire them and so on, and it's a bit like politics, parliamentary politics has crept into the editorial office.*

According to some interviewees, all these changes led to self-censorship, especially among newly recruited, young journalists. The respondents stressed that junior journalists were less willing to take on political or world-view topics.

*There has been no resistance [in the region] also because most of the journalists are young, not yet hardened, without any clearly articulated views. Some self-censor themselves.*

At the same time, some interviewees pointed out that after the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen, they still face similar problems regarding, for example, the selection of topics attractive enough to convert into the maximum number of online page views. On the other hand, however, they perceived that after the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen, new advertisers, which are often state-owned companies, started to advertise in the regional media.

*New advertisers such as the AZOTY group or companies subordinate to the state or the State Treasury, namely the Szczecin-Świnoujście Seaport Authority, have appeared.*

*In my time, when I was working there, we ran a wide variety of advertisements (...) Now, however, there are a lot of ads from companies which are subordinate to the state, companies like PZU, like PGNiG, (...) so we have a mouthpiece for Law and Justice propaganda, and just below you have, say, half a column of advertisements from Polska Grupa Energetyczna, PGE is advertising on the next page and Orlen Platinum Oil is sponsoring some kind of automotive poll. Only a very small number of the respondents noted that their freedom of journalistic activity had not been restricted despite the sweeping changes affecting their editorial offices.*

*I don't feel that someone is putting a right-wing gun to my head saying if you don't write this, you're out of job.*

These interviewees did not indicate any examples of interference with the finished material (“There were situations that made me nervous, but I cannot accuse anyone of distorting the truth or changing the piece in spite of someone”) and stressed that they remained free to choose their topics. With that said, one also indicated that, despite the relative professional freedom, they still had doubts about how independent the regional media could be, but countered this with the observation that there are currently no fully independent media anywhere.

*I, for one, was very worried about our independence after this takeover and couldn't sleep for a couple of nights because I couldn't imagine that these media would turn into a propaganda mouthpiece (...) It's a simple fact of life that no source is independent (...).*

## **6. Assessment of the independence of regional media in Poland**

In the last part of the interviews, interviewees were asked for their overall assessment of the state and development prospects of the regional media.

The interviewees are rather pessimistic about the future of the regional press. Some interviewees linked their negative assessment directly to the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen. In this context, some of the respondents pointed out that the takeover has not improved the financial situation of their editorial teams and that a policy aimed at maximising page views and advertising revenue persists, resulting in “the most valuable content being pushed into the darkest corner”. Equally important,

some of the interviewees expressed concern about what they perceived to be instances of potential political interference in the activities of newspapers, which in turn could lead to a reduction in their independence and a weakening of their ability to control those in power.

The personnel changes made by the new management of Polska Press, as well as the cases of interference with the freedom of journalistic activity, led some interviewees to conclude that the future and independence of regional media remain at risk. Some said that regional media “still have a long way to go to become another TVP info”. Other journalists participating in the survey pointed out, however, that their editorial offices have already started to operate in a way resembling TVP evening news.

*They are simply lampoons, as if the point was – more or less as in the news on TVP 1 – to ridicule the opposition, [the incumbent authorities of the opposition-ruled cities – editor’s note], to make the locals hate them so that they won’t be voting for them during the next elections. It’s just a big machinery and everything is geared towards this goal.*

*Our morning editorial meetings looked a bit like the [public] TV evening news, we tried to twist reality, to conjure it up somehow.*

According to some interviewees, the upcoming 2023-2025 elections will be an important touchstone for the quality of regional media journalism and their independence.

*We need to wait until the pre-election period to we see whether the newspaper will remain independent, which will be the main influence [of the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen – editor’s note]. Although in my opinion [the newspaper] is no longer [independent] because it is in the state structures, so it cannot be.*

In addition, some of the interviewees also linked the phenomenon of the poor state of the regional media to broader and more general trends, among which the decline in the readership of the press is the most important. Interviewees pointed out that traditional media are becoming increasingly unpopular and only a certain audience (mainly older people) is still attached to them.

*However, having worked in very small communities for a year, I know that these people actually (...) go to the corner shop every week to get this physical copy of their newspaper because they either don’t have access to any other format or it’s just inconvenient for them. However, we have an ageing society and there are still many people who simply do not want to or cannot read online. And they will be left with nothing [but the government-controlled printed press].*

Some of the interviewees also pointed to the declining interest in regional issues: Their observations show that the average reader focuses on either national or purely local issues, which in turn promotes either national media or small local publications at the expense of regional media.

Interviewees also pointed to competition in the media market, which also affects the position and functioning of regional media. In this context, some of the interviewees pointed out the problem of the functioning of local government newspapers – according to them, newspapers published by local governments are not independent media but they create very competitive and highly paid jobs, which



leads journalists to switch from traditional media to these news organisations. Moreover, the local government media, subsidised by the local government budget, compete with the traditional media “which try to stay afloat as commercially viable enterprises”.

Interviewees also pointed to the development of online media, which, while contributing to the decline in interest in traditional media, may also be a reaction to the difficult situation of the regional media.

*These traditional regional media are in a very bad state, but in their place new media have emerged, I mean online portals which are huge and may be cheaply maintained, but which are also very well run and gaining visibility.*

*How do you assess the state of the regional media in Poland?*

*They are in a permanent, dynamic crisis, but they are also looking for new solutions: I see the smarter companies opening up to new media, not only social media but also other online media.*

Although some of the problems facing these media - declining readership of the press, the competitiveness of the online editions of the regional media or the financial situation affecting employment conditions in the regional media - had started long before the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen, none of the interviewees said that the takeover had improved the situation of the regional media in the long term.

Finally, some interviewees referred to the assessment of the state of regional media from the perspective of their own experience and involvement in the creation of regional media outlets, often over many years. Especially for those journalists who left the regional media after Orlen's takeover of Polska Press out of fear of the politicisation of these media or in protest against the initiated changes, it remains particularly painful to observe the current media activities. Some interviewees perceived the changes introduced as very personal harm and injustice.

*Therefore, what happened arouses great regret in me and I still have only one such expectation (...) that the people who destroyed everything for which we worked here and for which probably hundreds if not thousands of people all over the country worked, that they will simply one day answer for it, that they will be held accountable (...) Because the work of many years and the entire crowd of people was simply trampled underfoot. I don't know if it'll ever happen because it'll probably be difficult (...) and it's such a frustration, such a sorrow, you know, mixed with such a sense of injustice.*

## 7. Annex 1 – Methodology

As part of the survey, 23 interviews were conducted with journalists who worked or have been working in 14 editorial offices of the regional media titles published by Polska Press.

The average length of employment of interviewees was 18 years; the longest-employed interviewee worked in regional media for 38 years and the respondent with the shortest length of employment worked for 6 years. The surveyed journalists included senior editors and heads of departments.

The selection of the sample also aimed to find out how long the interviewees had been employed by regional media after the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen. Of the 23 interviewees, eight remain employed in media titles published by Polska Press. The remaining 15 interviewees worked between 2 months and more than 12 months since the takeover of Polska Press by PKN Orlen (i.e., as of March 2021).

The interviews, based on a template, were conducted between August 2022 and April 2023. An important element of interviewees' participation in the study was to ensure their anonymity: none of the information cited in the report reveals the identity of the interviewees.

In some cases, interviewees' quotes have been redacted to remove personal information or add contextual information to convey the full meaning of an interviewee's statement.

During the preparation of the final report, we approached the management of Polska Press and the company's trade union with questions about the situation in the regional media, but received no answers.