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Protest against Unethical Reporting on Poland in the American Media

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The November 29, 2015 article by Jackson Diehl “Poland’s disturbing tilt to the right” in the Washington Post and Global Public Square Program by Fareed Zakaria in CNN of December 6, 2015 demonstrate biased journalism that violates principles of the Journalism Code of Ethics as well as the core values of the media industry such as journalistic integrity, diversity of viewpoints, and responsible content.

The above reports discrediting the new Polish government, elected through landslide victories in Presidential Elections of May 24, 2015 and Parliamentary Elections of October 25, 2015, promote a one-sided message crafted and widely promoted by those who have just lost all the power in Poland for the first time since WWII and their allies. The propaganda of the losers, not verified and not balanced by the voice of the new Polish government, is aggressively promoted in the United States, to the detriment of the Polish American relations and Polish American community, which overwhelmingly supports the changes that are taking place in Poland.

The accusations and charges against the new Polish government are either outright false or grossly overstated, exaggerated and misleading. Information presented was not properly verified, diversity of viewpoints was not assured, and the reporting was harmful to Poland and American Polonia. Accordingly, appropriate disciplinary measures should be undertaken by the journalistic ethics watchdogs, apologies should be issued by Washington Post and CNN, and corrective reporting should be presented to the American public. The following misleading statements are examples of unethical reporting by Washington Post and CNN:

“Voiding the appointment of 5 judges to the Constitutional Tribunal.”

This issue has been presented as a proof for coup d’état by the winning Law and Justice Party (“PIS”) coalition. The fact that the losing Civic Platform (“CP”) created this problem by pushing in June of 2015 unconstitutional amendments to the law governing the Constitutional Tribunal was not addressed. These unconstitutional changes were rushed in order to appoint CP judges before the end of term in anticipation of the defeat in the October parliamentary elections. The key amendments pushed by the CP in June of 2015 were ruled as unconstitutional by the Constitutional Tribunal on December 3, 2015. The reporting does not address this problem at all. Instead, only representatives of CP are quoted and presented as victims of PIS abuse of power.

“Installing a new chief of the secret security services who was previously convicted of abuse of power for prosecuting political opponents.”

This is an especially egregious message that undermines the most dedicated and courageous public servant who risked his life in fighting corruption at the highest levels of the government

during his tenure as Chairman of the Central Anticorruption Bureau between 2006 and 2009. He was dismissed by then Prime Minister Donald Tusk before the end of his term and accused of exceeding his authority. The motive for his prosecution by the CP was clearly spelled out in the secretly taped conversation between the Polish tycoon Jan Kulczyk who suddenly died in July 2015 and Chairman of the Supreme Audit Bureau Krzysztof Kwiatkowski on the privatization of Ciech, one of the largest and strategic state companies in Poland. The tapes showing corruption at the highest levels were made public on October 22, 2015. They include the following comment by Kulczyk: “Here, a bit unnecessarily Donald (Tusk) wanted to be above all this, and did not eliminate Kaminski. We would not have all these subsequent problems...” Clearly, the power structures behind the scene effectively pushed for the elimination of the public servant they feared the most. By taking the stand against Mariusz Kaminski, the US media may be viewed as the voice in support of systemic corruption in Poland.

“Bringing back Soviet style censorship.”

Mr. Zakaria announces in CNN that the new Minister of Culture banned a play by the Nobel Prize winner. Again, this is a gross disinformation. In his official statement the Minister of Culture stated that a play entitled “Death of a girl” directed by Ewelina Marciniak is about to be presented to the public in the Polish Theater in Wroclaw, which has been financed from public funds. The advertisement for this play stated that a sex act was to be performed during the play by porno actors invited from abroad. A nine year old boy was to take part in this play. It is worth reminding Mr. Zakaria that in the United States such porno and obscenity are not protected by free speech either and no one of right mind views this restriction as “Soviet style censorship.”

“The party has reneged on the promise to take in thousands of refugees and has contributed to anti-immigrant rhetoric that critics said has emboldened dark forces in Poland.”

While the government of Beata Szydlo has not “reneged” on the promise to take refugees, she pointed out that just taking the refugees without addressing the core problems of mass migration is not a solution. Contrary to Mr. Zakaria’s statement, Poland did not renege on the promise to take political refugees but did object to taking in economic migrants because the Polish economy can’t support them. It would be only fair to mention that Poland has recently accepted several hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian refugees.

Furthermore, the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs in an interview on Polish television also proposed helping Syrian arrivals in Europe by forming an army that could fight back for Syria. That is what the Polish refugees from USSR did in 1941. They formed the Anders Army and went on to fight for Poland! “The tens of thousands of young Syrians who jump out of the rubber rafts and don’t ask for water, food or clothes, but ask where they can charge their mobile phones could, with our help, fight to get their country back,” Minister Waszczykowski said. “Can you imagine a situation where we send our troops to fight for Syria, while hundreds of thousands of young Syrian “refugees” sip coffee on Unter den Linden” — a boulevard in Berlin — “or at the old town square and watch how we fight for their security?” Minister Waszczykowski asked. This logical and valid question on the Syrian crisis has not registered with Mr. Zakaria at all. Instead, he continued his hateful reporting on Poland as follows:

“At one recent rally people burned an effigy of an orthodox Jew.”

This is the climax of Mr. Zakaria’s revelations. Unfortunately, he did not report that this heinous act as well as the person who committed it have been condemned by the organizers of the rally and that this perpetrator is a professional provocateur. Piotr Rybak tried to work within several anti-Civic Platform groups in Poland in the past. Pawel Kukiz commented that his movement has been infiltrated and played out by the people like Rybak. Representatives of the National Movement also condemned his act, stating that with 99% certainty this was a provocation of post-communist forces, just like before when a security booth in front of the Russian Embassy was set on fire in order to discredit the Independence March.

According to secretly taped conversations released in May 2015, the Minister of Internal Affairs in the Tusk Government ordered his special forces to burn the security booth near the Russian Embassy in order to discredit the Independence March and the national movement. It is regrettable that Mr. Zakaria did not report on the release of these tapes from the conversation between Chief of Anticorruption Bureau Pawel Wojtunik and Deputy Prime Minister in the Tusk Government Ms. Bienkowska about involvement in this provocation of the Ministry of Interior Affairs led by Sienkiewicz. These tapes were recorded in 2014 and released in 2015. Had he done his research, his reporting on “dark forces” in Poland could lose its emotive misdirection.

Prime Minister Szydlo “named as defense minister an outspoken anti-Semite.”

The anti-Semitism accusations have been prejudicially unleashed against Poland in Mr. Diehl’s article in Washington Post of November 29, 2015 entitled “Poland’s disturbing tilt to the right.” In it, Mr. Diehl makes a powerful defamatory statement that Prime Minister “named as defense minister an outspoken anti-Semite.” This patently false and outrageously provocative statement is made against one of the icons of the Solidarity Movement, a founding father of the historic KOR - Committee for Defense of Workers, who was jailed during student protests in 1968, and has a track record as a staunch defender of the Polish Jews.

Why then such a brutal attack on Minister Macierewicz? He has been the leading critic of the investigations conducted by Putin and Tusk governments with respect to the crash of the Polish Air Force One in Smolensk, Russia, on April 10, 2010, which claimed the life of President Lech Kaczynski and the entire Central Command of the Polish Armed Forces, including five top NATO generals (“Smolensk Crash”). For the past five years Minister Macierewicz has been leading the Polish parliamentary investigation into the cause of this crash, battling the onslaught from the Tusk and Putin governments as well as their allies.

The parliamentary committee for the investigation of the Smolensk Crash led by Mr. Macierewicz concluded that the Polish Air Force One was destroyed by explosions. Among key persons involved in this tragedy were members of the Tusk government, including his Minister of Foreign Affairs Radoslaw Sikorski, an outspoken enemy of Lech and Jaroslaw Kaczynski and Mr. Macierewicz, and an influential figure in the United States. It was the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Sikorski that chose Tomasz Turowski, a dangerous communist agent implicated in the assassination attempt on John Paul II, to oversee the preparations for the Smolensk visit of President Kaczynski in April 2010; it was Sikorski who informed Jaroslaw Kaczynski just half an hour after the crash that due to pilot’s error everybody on board died; it was the Sikorski

Ministry that oversaw burning of the personal belongings of the victims of the crash, and it was Sikorski who used his ministerial position to persecute Mr. Macierewicz and his investigation committee for any attempts to get help from the United States in the Smolensk investigation. Knowing that the new President and the new Government in Poland is determined to properly investigate this crash, monumental in its historic significance, Sikorski is now actively involved in discrediting the Polish President and the Government of Beata Szydło.

It is important to point out that Sikorski was dismissed from the CP government in disgrace. On one of the secretly recorded tapes released in June of 2014, he is heard as saying that “the Polish American alliance is useless and even detrimental.” He also ridicules the United States by saying “zrobiliśmy laskę Amerykanom,” which can be translated as “we made fool of Americans.” It is in the public interest to examine whether the brutal attacks on the new Polish government in the Washington Post and CNN were influenced by Radosław Sikorski.

It remains to be seen whether the onslaught on the legitimate Polish government in the American media is inspired by Radosław Sikorski acting in self-defense against accountability or is it a wider plan. Whatever the answer is, the situation exposes significant vulnerability of the American public to the propaganda hostile to its *raison d'état*. After all, Poland has been the strongest and the most loyal ally of the United States in Europe.

In light of the biased and unprofessional reporting against the legitimate Polish government, I call upon the Society of Professional Journalists to take appropriate measures against journalists who violated the Code of Ethics. I also call upon CNN and Washington Post to correct unprofessional reporting on Poland and publically apologize. Polish Americans expects a balanced reporting that fairly presents the position of both sides of the political debate in Poland and considers the voice of the Polish Americans who overwhelmingly support the current Polish government and were instrumental in returning PIS to power.

Sincerely yours,

Maria Szonert Binienda

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