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Guarantee of equality in politics? The media discourse analysis on the subject of introducing the gender parity into electoral law in Poland

ABSTRACT. The project is aiming at the quality analysis of a media discussion about introducing the gender parity to electoral law and the analysis of the activities of the Association of Congress of Women. Selected press publications are the basis of the quality analysis (according to the Critical Discourse Analysis) taken from the most opinion-creating journals. The objective of this paper is to identify the discourse (civil; non-civil) of analyzed journals.

KEYWORDS: gender parity, electoral lists, quota solution, Poland, rhetoric of the equality, CDA

Opportunities and barriers to increase participation of the Polish women in the political space

It is said that the authority (both actual and symbolic) belongs to the category of the oldest social relations, which are inextricably linked not only with violence, but also with freedom. To understand, as Magdalena Środa says, „the sources and forms of violence is to put a major step on the road to freedom” (2009, p. 9). That is why a reason to reflect on the problem of women and men in the sphere of domination, power and gender relations in society and the public sphere in Poland already has its own tradition. Today, it is manifested not only in the number of scientific articles (Agacinski, 2000; Malinowska, 2000; Graff, 2001; Titkow, 2003, 2011; Siemieńska, 2005; Firlit-Fesnak, 2005; Fuszara, 2006; Walczewska, 2006; Środa, 2009; Krzyżanowska, 2012a, 2012b), but mainly in the form of collective action. While reconstructing the history of women in the twentieth century (who were) willing to participate in politics) it is difficult to resist the feeling that not much has changed in the twenty-first century. Since women won active and passive voting rights for themselves in 1918, (which, contrary to a popular belief, was

no standard at that time on the European continent) women, neither in the pre-war nor the post-war politics were sufficiently large, strong group (so-called critical mass), which could have an impact on the course of action taken under it (and it seems that for the time being the trend is to be continued). Many studies reveal the fact of women's under-representation at both central and local levels (Niżyńska, 2011, p. 5). According to various studies (Fuszara, 2007a, 2007b, 2011b; Siemieńska, 2000, 2003; Titkow, 2003) the reasons for this phenomenon, are varied and fall mainly into two categories: reasons known as cultural and institutional. The first group includes stereotypes and different expectations assigned to women and men, and the latter one concerns mechanisms in political parties which make difficult for women to be among people who have the opportunity to be chosen (Fuszara, 2011b, p. 4). The efforts of liberal feminism are centered around the creation and the protection of equal opportunities for women through legislation and other means of democracy in order to achieve justice and equality – the gender justice (Putnam Tong, 2002, p. 8). As Małgorzata Fuszara writes: it is not enough to just remove discrimination in order to create gender equality but it is necessary to give power (2006, p. 273). In view of that, the establishment of the liberal wing of the feminist thought would be a theoretical point of reference in this thesis.

If we talk about the power we should recall strategies of increasing the number of candidates on electoral lists' (in the typology of Joni Lovenduski). These are: (1) the guarantee of equality (parity or system volume); (2) the promotion of equality (including workshops, training for women); (3) the rhetoric of equality (the general acceptance of the pursuit of balanced representation, „political discourse, speech and the texts of political leaders – call for women to stand for election and electoral participation” (Childs, Lovenduski & Campbell, 2005, p. 24, for: Niżyńska, 2011, p. 5).

When we analyze the quality of Polish debate we will see that there are problems in distinguishing between the concept of „parity” of the concept of „amount,” so they are worth emphasizing. The law of the proportion of the number of candidates are written in the constitution and / or in the elections statute that determine the proportion of both sexes on the electoral lists of all political parties. They determine for example the minimum number of an under-represented group – in this case, women – which gives them proportional representation to correct the existing imbalance. In case of parity (Fr. *Parite*, Lat. *Paritas* – equality) it is 50

percent and in case of quota it is 35 percent. Quota system is used frequently along with the „slider” or alternate system – placing of male and female candidates on the list in turns – in order to increase the effectiveness of regulatory framework. The amounts should be treated as a specific measure used temporarily, in order to accelerate the actual equality in politics (Graff, 2001: 52).

Five years of congress of women (1st–5th Congress of Women)

Revitalize the debate on parity and bill pritties

As shown above, the measures directed towards gender equality are not a new phenomenon in the twenty-first century. However, after a number of previous efforts, the debate on the issue of equal participation of women and men in Poland gained the status of the public only in 2009 (Fuszara, 2011a, p. 121-6). You can point at the specific social time here – the celebration of the 20th anniversary of the transformation of Polish democracy and the initiative Congress of Women, a social movement, association and the annual conference (forum) at the same time, the aim of which was to diagnose and improve the status of Polish women in several areas of social and political life. Congress was seen as a minor even a little „crazy” event, later called „woman populism.” And the demand of Congress who „pushed a model of gender democracy” to all skeptics and critics seemed to be trivial and ridiculous (Bilska, 2010). The 1st Congress of Women, which took place in June 2009 in Warsaw gathered several thousands of women from across the country and has formulated a number of proposals. The most important one and the most urgent was the requirement to introduce parity on electoral lists.

Voices and fate of the Congress of Women post quota solutions

Civic draft law on parity, prepared by 1st Congress of Women and experts working with him, was submitted to Parliament on 21st December 2009. It gathered 156 thousand signatures, which was an indicator of its social acceptance.

Bronisław Komorowski – even as a presidential candidate – announced during the 2nd Congress of Women, that if he wins the election, he will approve the law on the equal participation of both sexes on the electoral lists. However, despite several months of negotiations and numerous promises from the highest authorities it did not happen. Parity strongly divided not only journalists and experts, but also the people on whom the fate of the Act depended – namely – the politicians. Consequently, a draft law on the parliamentary amendments changing 50 percent of the par amount of the 35 percent was adopted. The Parliament did not accept the alternate placement of women in the first five places on electoral lists or the need to ensure the amount in quota in case of the resignation of any of the candidates (Stowarzyszenie, 2010).

Following a significant modification of the original version of the civil draft and the observation the process of the preparation of electoral rolls in batches, the Women's Congress stated that the quota Act is an insufficient solution. Therefore, a draft amendment to the law of increasing to 45 percent the number of women on the lists and introducing a system of „slide” was introduced at the 3rd Congress of Women. According to Danuta Hübner it was also diagnosed that: „although the parties comply with their obligation to that 35 percent of women on electoral lists is ensured, but most often it is a formal and quantitative treatment” (*Wiadomości*, 2011).

Suggestions and recommendations of the Congress – supported by the results of scientific studies – did not bring the expected results. Social excitement and enthusiasm also gradually fell. Hence at the end of the 4th Congress of Women in 2012 the introduction of gender parity and alternans on electoral lists was re-introduced (the first attempt was made three years earlier) (www.stowarzyszeniekongreskobiet.pl).

Unfulfilled, although once promised, the subject to increase quotas for electoral lists was not quite as pointedly emphasized at the 5th Congress of Women in 2013 and has been marginalized in favor of other issues and demands (Kongres Kobiet, 2013).

Public opinion about legal guarantees gender equality policy

While in the 1st Congress of Women, on the wave of public enthusiasm, the organizers of the Congress formulated the most important and most urgent demand – the introduction of parity to the electoral

code, a month after the Congress (July 2009), opponents of the introduction of regulations initiated contraction. That contraction, 'an environment' opposed to the idea of gender parity, was treated as a kind of civic manifesto. It took the form of an open letter „We do not want parity” (Michaliszyn, 2010). The letter was published in two of the most widely read and influential socio-political newspapers – *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita (Gazeta Wyborcza, 2009)*. The publication of the letter, and as a result the enrichment of the debate have ended the joint initiative of skeptics and opponents of parity. However, as a consequence of popularizing issues of equal number of women in politics, research centers of public opinion have recognized the need of testing the Poles opinion on the subject. The study mainly checked the opinion on gender parity on electoral lists. All surveys quoted below were conducted on a nationwide, random and representative sample of the Polish adults.

According to one of the largest and most renowned public opinion research institutes in Poland, in 2010, the respondents declared themselves as advocates of increasing the participation of women in the political sphere. According to almost half of the respondents (47 percent), „now in politics there are too few women, and therefore steps should be taken to change this state of affairs” (CBOS, 2010). In addition, other research has shown clearly that „the Polish society recognizes the problem of insufficient participation of women in politics and acknowledges that it has to do also with the barriers present in the political parties to create lists of candidates” (IPA, 2010).

The most indicated by the Polish people way to increase the percentage of women in political life was to encourage women to be active in this area. As to the question of imposing a percentage of the minimum number of women on electoral lists (as a form of Act) public opinion was divided. Proponents of this type of control pointed to the „unequal opportunities for women in the access to important decision-making positions in the country. Opponents appealed to the slogan of positive discrimination, which – in their opinion – favors women at the expense of men” (CBOS, 2010). Hypothetical explanation for skepticism about the law or the quota parity solution could be the reluctance of citizens – remembering the times of communism in Poland – „the top-down regulation of the electoral and indirect enforcement of voting citizens” (CBOS, 2010).

Media discourse analysis on the implementation of gender parity to the electoral code

But before civil bill was sent to the Parliament, and advocated by the Congress voted ratio was changed to 35 percent of the amount without the „slider,” media discussions on women in politics did not stop. *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* – two of the largest, most influential (IMM, 2009) and at the same time for a long time arguing with each other dailies have played a special role in the spread of the discourse. The main objective of an analysis given above was to make the following analysis of critical discourse analysis of media for the introduction of gender parity on electoral lists. The representatives of the symbolic elites, who through the mass media form their opinions, identify issues for discussion, exchange arguments and use the specific vocabulary to describe social reality are responsible shaping public discourse (Jabłońska, 2009, p. 16). Press publications published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* 22nd June 2009 (after the 1st Congress of Women) to 22nd December 2009 (the day after the Congress of Women gave the Marshal of the Sejm the list of signatures under civil parity bill) served as a research material. It should be noted that the analyzed time period was special due to the fact that during the 1st Congress of Women the demand for the introduction of parity was proposed. What is more, there has been the debate on women in politics at that time and it had the widest-reaching unprecedented scale in Poland.

The people decided to analyze the contents of the press to focus on the critical discourse analysis purpose – to expose social inequality expressed and reinforced through language and work towards the emancipation of disadvantaged groups who are excluded from participation in the discourse or marginalized (Habermas, 1999; van Dijk, 2001). As Walery Pisarek says: It can perform the function of a specific tool to help to describe and sometimes even „discover the real characteristics of the newspaper as a stream of messages” (1983, p. 59). Critical Discourse Analysis in Teun A. van Dijk’s model also allows us to answer the question of the specificity of the new bias (2001, p. 19). For this reason the attitude of *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* to introduce gender parity on electoral lists to determine the discursive profile of each log and classify the test titles for the appropriate model of civil discourse or non-civil has been done the subject of research. During the research the assumptions of the theory of communicative action and the concept of

the Jürgen Habermas public sphere and the theory of symbolic violence and the political field concept of Pierre Bourdieu were used (Habermas, 1999; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2001). Bourdieu's assumptions completes the concepts of power ministry (pastoral) and the discourse of power by Michel Foucault (1977, 2002).

The main objective of this article is to determine whether legal guarantees for women (in the form of parity law) are a new kind of elite bias symbolic expressed in public discourse. Characteristics that are relevant to examine the relationship of *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* to introduce gender parity on electoral lists were: (1) the number of articles and existing thematic strands within the selected issue (its multifaceted, or the topics which were ignored) in the participation of the foreign politicians, experts and commentators; (2) vocabulary and argumentative line types which dominate on the pages of various newspapers, allowing the identification of a closed or open nature of the discourse (the vocabulary consensual or war); (3) internal and external combinations, that appeared in the discussion initiated in the press. The journalists understood 'connections within the debates' as the appeal of the magazine to other writers appearing on the pages of the same newspaper (internal connection), and references to the authors of the contributors to the pages of other newspapers (external connections). These connections make up the so-called grid discursive – the network of cross-cutting references in the area of which opinions and polemics were exchanged.

Number of articles and main topics

During the studies fourteen articles were published in the *Rzeczpospolita* newspaper. In most of them readers demanded parity. And *Gazeta Wyborcza* published forty-three articles (mainly in the form of current information on the activities of the Women's Congress and negotiations with politicians on par Act) (Figure 1).

Articles on parity appeared in the press irregularly. The most lively discussion both in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* took place in July 2009, after the Congress of Women. According to Natalia Krzyżanowska that was „probably stimulated by the surprise effect caused by scale of the events” (2012b, p. 208). In the coming months, *Gazeta Wyborcza* systematically, although with less intensity informed about the issue of parity, while *Rzeczpospolita* rarely published articles on the subject.



Figure 1. Number of articles in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*.

Source: Own calculations on the basis of press

Despite the quantitative differences (*Gazeta Wyborcza* published more than three times more articles than *Rzeczpospolita*) it should be noted the qualitative differences in how newspapers analyzed the issue in terms of themes and contexts in which is depicted gender parity. More precisely, what was the relationship of the author to the presented content and what form of journalism prevailed. Parity was widely presented in *Gazeta Wyborcza* (both reports, commentaries and newspaper columns), in the studied timeframe number and content of press was quite extensive and diverse in terms of the presented ideas and opinions on issues of gender parity on electoral lists. *Gazeta Wyborcza* kept informed about the activities of the Women's Congress towards the draft law for civil par. As a result, a wide range of expression of particular symbolic elites, related to the idea of parity was presented in the newspaper. An overall analysis shows that parity was received with both enthusiasm and hope, as well as with irony or hostility. There were twenty-one „for parity” votes, fourteen „neutral” and eight „against parity.”

The discourse of *Rzeczpospolita* was mainly based on journalistic digressions, which do not refer to the facts. *Rzeczpospolita*'s press material of the analyzed issues were extremely modest. A distinctive feature of the journal was its 'position', which was clearly „against parity.” The chart shows that another characteristic feature of *Rzeczpospolita* was a clear lack of information from the country – its content was mostly dominated by unilateral publicists, sociologists and other experts. During the study, the vast majority of articles published in the pages of *Rzeczpospolita* were texts condemning the idea of gender parity on electoral lists. There were nine such votes, four were „neutral” and one „for parity.”

Dominant phraseology and types of argumentative lines

Parity was described in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, with usage of diverse vocabulary. That was dominated by the term „neutral,” such as the legal guarantees of women, a leveling mechanism, the adjustment of the system, or simply par. In addition to the terms „neutral” about the parity itself people talk with approval: „principle of justice” [GW. 06.07.2009, 16.07.2009], „tool to solve the problems of women” [GW. 17.08.2009], „unlock tool” [GW. 07-08.11.2009]. In the newspaper critical synonymous concepts such as „social engineering” [GW. 07.07.2009, 25.08.2009, 04.09.2009], „awkward barrier” [GW. 05.08.2009], or „artificial solution” [GW. 26.08.2009] can also be found. As the analysis in *Gazeta Wyborcza* shows the phraseology that presented the idea of parity in a heterogeneous manner was used. Although *Gazeta Wyborcza* presented clearly approving position on civil parity bill initiative (support the initiative of collecting signatures for a civil bill) we can talk about the complexity of the feedback and comments. The newspaper presented views of both Polish and foreign politicians, sociologists, psychologists, other experts and other representatives of the symbolic elites.

On the pages of *Rzeczpospolita* parity is explained mainly by pejoratively colored vocabulary. About the parity on the newspaper there were names as follows: „forced participation of women” [Rz. 10.07.2009], „fetish of the leftwing politics,” „curse,” „extreme injustice,” „prosthetic parity” [Rz. 14.07.2009], „social engineering” [Rz. 14.07.2009, 19.11.2009], „numerus clausus” [Rz. 24.07.2009], „artificial support,” „imposing collective identity” [Rz. 19.11.2009], „schizophrenia” [Rz. 21.12.2009]. At the same time the phraseology of war was strongly present as well. The proof for this can be numerous titles of articles which were critical to the idea of parity, as well as their content filled with vocabulary of war such as „fight for top positions,” „fight for positions,” „urge to power,” [Rz. 09.07.2009], „rivalry between the original hordes” [Rz. 24.07.2009], „the struggle for parity” [Rz. 19.11.2009]. On the basis of clearly accented line of argument, a specific rhetorical community (manifested in such phrases as „we know those routes,” „forcing us” [Rz. 19.11.2009], and „everyone admitted that” has developed [Rz. 21.12.2009]). Therefore, it cannot be identified with the community of communication within the meaning of Habermas, because it does not meet the basic conditions of civil discourse, as shown in the following analysis. The specificity of the closed community of rhetoric is to present the world

according to the distribution of „we-they” (Figure 2). In this way, *Rzeczpospolita* performs pastoral authority within the meaning of Foucault, when for the sake of „herd” it directs it, decide what is good for it and what is bad, thus depriving it of the possibility self-evaluation and selection. It is therefore highly persuasive picture, acting on the imagination of readers, which extremely simplifies and distorts reality. It is the creation of the world with a clear distinction between „us” and „them,” the category of „we” reflects all the positive qualities while the other, assign only negative traits.

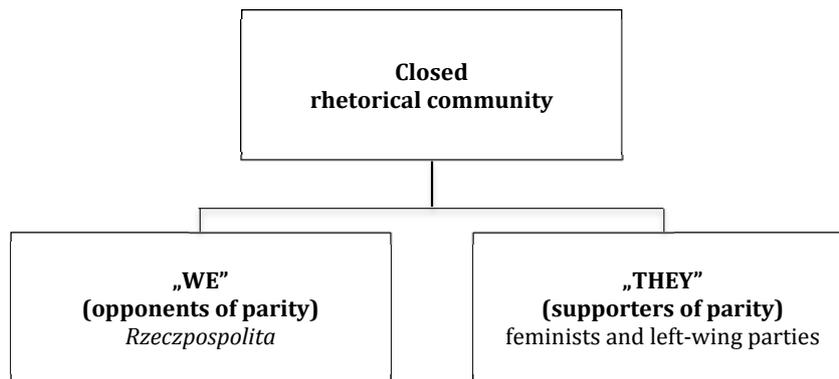


Figure 2. Create a closed community of rhetoric as an example of *Rzeczpospolita*.
Source: Own calculations on the basis of press

The identification of discursive profile was important to analyze the argumentative strategies used by elite symbolic. An overall analysis shows that the line of argument used by *Rzeczpospolita* was based primarily on the attack. It was conducted using a variety of eristic techniques, including *argumentum ad personam*, in which the subject matter is transferred to the personal plane of competition and is intended to overcome, not convince the opponent. This treatment is also characteristic for press publications of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, but to a much lesser intensity. It should be noted, however, that both in *Rzeczpospolita* and in *Gazeta Wyborcza* examples of the use of rational argument, in which the sender's intention was to convince their own reasons for using rational proof were found as well. Moreover, the part of argumentation expressed reasoning, respect and appreciation for different views, as well

as a desire to reach an agreement (such examples occur often in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, and to a much lesser extent in *Rzeczpospolita*). This means that, de facto, that in *Gazeta Wyborcza* communication procedures have been complied with in accordance with the objectives of civil discourse. The contents of the two analyzed logs were the basis for creation of collective typologies of dominant argument, supporters and opponents of the introduction of gender parity to the electoral code (Table 1, Table 2).

Table 1.

Types of arguments for supporters of the introduction of gender parity in electoral lists

Type I	The more women, the better the quality of the policy: the increased participation of women in politics will result in better quality, because it will be fewer fights and aggression, and more substantive discussion and action.
Type II	The destruction of the glass ceiling: parity should be introduced because it is harder for women to get access to places that men consider attractive.
Type III	Parity is not so terrible, so you might want to take a chance: if the legal guarantees would facilitate and enable societal transformations represent the society in which women are the majority, it's worth the risk to introduce parity.

Source: Own calculations on the basis of press

Table 2.

Types of arguments for opponents of the introduction of gender parity in electoral lists

Type I	Parity handicapping and humiliates women: all the legal safeguards that promote women are synonymous with lack of self-reliance, self-confidence and desperate women who want to usurp the right to support them just because they are women.
Type II	Education instead of the law: to educate and thereby alter the consciousness of society, that men and women believe in a woman, and not resort to the „artificial” solutions in the form of legislation.
Type III	Unjustified fashion for women: to promote women talk a lot now, creating new trends and recognizing the priority of equality at all costs.
Type IV	Fear of „chain reaction”: if quotas are introduced to political life, then you probably will go beyond the narrow confines of entering the proportions 50/50 also in supervisory boards and scientific boards.
Type V	Parity is a propaganda and a waste of time: efforts to introduce parity are bad, short-sighted and irrational. The argument that „democracy without women is half of democracy” is absurd.
Type VI	More women means more questionable quality policy: greater presence of women in politics do not result in the better quality, because most women „do not know anything about politics.”

Source: Own calculations on the basis of press

Discursive net

When you identify the type of discursive profile, examining the discursive net of related articles, that appeals for release of journalists to other writers appearing on the pages of the same newspaper (so-called internal calls), and references to the authors of the contributors to the pages of other newspapers (so-called external connections) is also important. The final results of the analysis showed that the majority of internal references appeared in *Gazeta Wyborcza*. This means that the newspaper columnists frequently referred to their arguments and alluded polemics, at the same time presenting their own point of view. Eight such connections are identified, including two with approving emotions ('emotional' in Figure 3 marked „+”), four are critical ('emotional' in Figure 3 marked „-”), and two ambivalent (no mark). Most reactions were given to arguments presented by the proponents of parity advocating its introduction due to the fact that the increased participation of women in politics will result in the better quality. There are these articles which focused most polemics and opinion exchanges (in particular, provoking criticism).

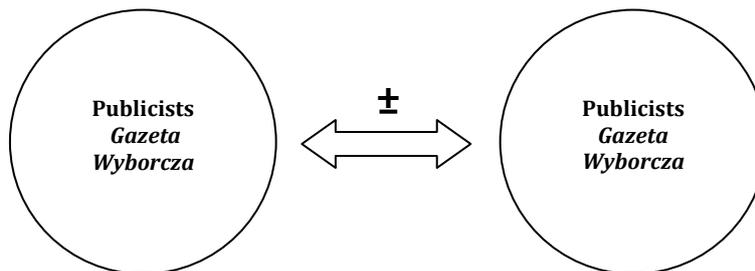


Figure 3. Discursive net *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

Source: Own calculations on the basis of press

However, less-developed network of discursive was identified in *Rzeczpospolita*. Six connections between newspaper articles were found, three internal and three external. It should be noted that the journalists of the newspaper appealed to their texts in an approving way ('emotional' in Figure 4 labeled „+”), confirming the critical attitude of the newspaper to parity. Therefore, despite the fact that in *Rzeczpospolita* internal links were identified, this could not be considered as an indication of

civil discourse because most of the appeals was to maintain a monolithic argument of opponents of parity. The journalism of this newspaper was based on the ritual repetition of the arguments that have long been established. As for external connections, in *Rzeczpospolita* the line of argument was based primarily on the attack, directed exclusively toward the editors of *Gazeta Wyborcza* ('emotional' in Figure 4 marked „-“). It should be noted that the daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* has no direct polemics towards *Rzeczpospolita* within the analyzed issue. Hence, no external connections were identified in *Gazeta Wyborcza*. In conclusion, the *Rzeczpospolita* discourse does not build a community of communications, but excludes from it in the sense that (with minor exceptions) does not allow for different points of view. What is more, the primary response to the diversity of worldviews is attack – directed mainly towards the editors of *Gazeta Wyborcza*. Thus, the profile of the *Rzeczpospolita* discursive is a part of the unsocial model of discourse, which is characterized by blocking the agreement and the creation of symbolic divisions („they” are the ones who belong to the communities of feminist and/or left-wing parties). At the same time such profile has the characteristics which disseminate domination and coercion, because the intentions of the sender are in fact hidden (through the usage of treatments which distort the image of social reality).

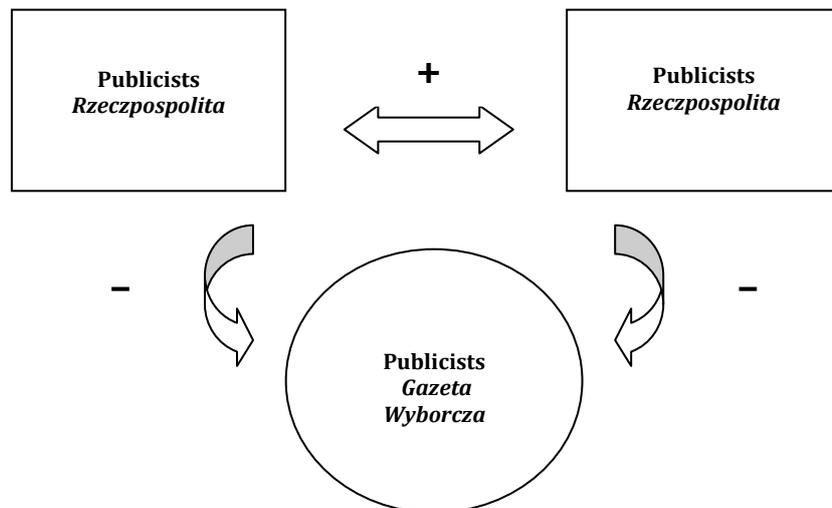


Figure 4. Discursive net *Rzeczpospolita*.

Source: Own calculations on the basis of press

Conclusions

The main objective of this debate was to make a critical analysis of the media discourse on the issue of the introduction of gender parity on electoral lists in Poland. Research was based on articles published in *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* – two of the most widely read and influential socio-political newspapers in Poland. In the analyzed press more characteristics in favor of closed (and thus non-civil) discourse have been identified. The closest to the ideal type of an open discourse (or civil) was *Gazeta Wyborcza*. This feature could be attributed to *Rzeczpospolita* to a much lesser extent.

Based on analyzed discussions, monitoring the activities of the Association of Congress of Women, and observing the fate of the parity law – as amended by the parliamentarians of quota – it can be said that the legal guarantee for women (in the form of parity law) is a new kind of symbolic elites notice. Prejudice is expressed in a kind of public discourse, the discourse of power and authority. You can also draw a further conclusion that this is a form of discourse that reflects the Polish public sphere that (in the present case) stands out limited possibilities of reconciliation of claims and cooperation of social actors. Consequently, this results on the one hand in marginalization (Wnuk-Lipiński, 2008, p. 272) and the objectification of disadvantaged (reducing their perpetration and significance), on the other hand strengthening the privileged (Hodge & Kress, 1988).

Design by representatives of the Congress of Women, and other experts – the legal principle of gender parity on electoral lists alternans – despite the status of one of the most popular, relevant and at the same time controversial topics (effectively marginalized by the dominant elite) is slowly losing its importance. Therefore it can be concluded that the acceptance and adoption of the law recommended by the Congress of Women in this shape/form, is – in this specific social time – an unattainable postulate. Perhaps that is why the Congress activists are currently considering whether to remain a social movement or turn into a party and take part in the next parliamentary elections in 2015. For now, activists have decided to set up a Political Council, whose task will be to support women seeking an electoral mandate (*Puls Biznesu*, 2013).

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