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The Media Interregnum: Locating the Transformations in Media Power in Ukraine, Russia and Poland

This study focuses on how journalists and policymakers in Ukraine, Russia and Poland perceive the changes in the influence of journalists and media in their countries following the 2014-2015 watershed moment (Ukrainian crisis; change of government in Poland). One of the aspects focuses on how media professionals contest existing structures of power relations in different ways. The empirical material includes 33 interviews with journalists, policy makers and experts in the three countries approached from the vantage points of Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere, Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, and mediatization theory and analysed with the help of qualitative discourse analysis (a discourse-historical approach inspired by the Vienna school). It is argued that Ukrainian journalists have used a powerful Europe-as-values concept to actively intervene in the political field and recontextualise this narrative of Europe as the official foreign policy narrative. This was enabled, paradoxically, by weak professionalism that allowed wavering from a neutral stance. At the same time, it is exactly this weak professionalism that further stimulates political intervention in the media field. Compared to this, in Russia the strong discourse on journalist objectivity constrains journalists in the scope of social practice, refraining them from challenging the political field in a similar fashion. The Polish journalists, ambiguous about their own influence, work in a loop that recontextualises discourses from media sphere to policy and vice versa. Altogether, the three post-Communist media systems represent a curious case of mediatization as a deep interpenetration of the media field and other social realms.

Keywords: media, discourse, power, journalists, politicians, Europe, Ukraine, Russia, Poland