



Catholic radios in Poland

## Between Co-existence, Cooperation and Competition

By Andrea Sofie Jannusch

Almost three years ago a journalist ironically argued that: "Poland seems to convert into a country where every second citizen claims to be a politician and every hundredthousandth wants to possess his own TV or radio-station. But where the audience should come from remains open."<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile we can say that this description shows only "half the truth": We still find a relation of approximately 200,000 inhabitants per radio. Nevertheless, with 160 private stations, the Polish radio scene becomes highly competitive.

Catholic radios play quite an important role in this Central European country – not only relating to their number, but also to their popularity. However in the pattern of Catholic stations covering the Polish map, one finds a quite heterogeneous picture. There are very small parish amateur-radios, broadcasting for a few hours per day and financed by donations from their listeners, as well as highly professionalized, popular and commercially orientated regional radios. 33 of these are organized in the *Ogólnopolskie Stowarzyszenie Rozgłosni Katolickich* (All-Polish Catholic radio network) VOX. And besides this we find *Radio Maryja*, founded by the Redemptorists in Torun, spreading its programmes with an approval for national coverage through more than 50 local licences.

The various approaches towards the formation of a Catholic radio are still being widely discussed in Poland. All Catholic stations seek to contribute to the evangelization of the Polish people, but the different opinions about the most adequate realization of the common aims create obvious divisions especially among the VOX-radios, updating the debate because of the need to build up joint services and common initiatives for all members.

To make the complex picture more transparent, the variety of stations could be reduced to three models: the *Purists*, including stations with a strong emphasis on religious programmes; the CCC's – characterized as *Commercial - Catholic*

## Diocesan access

– *Competitive*, where purely religious broadcasts form only a smaller part of the overall programming; and in between, the *Compromisers*, trying to combine both philosophies in their broadcasts. The underlying guidelines implicate not only different programme content but also induce a specific performance, influencing the search for economic sources and the type of listeners gained, as well as predictions for future prospects of survival in the media landscape either in co-existence, cooperation or competition.

## Historical conditions

Conditions for the actual presence of the Catholic church in the electronic media go back to the year 1988, when the opposition forced the communist government to allow the founding of Catholic radio stations. On 17th May 1989, this agreement gained its juridical base with the accent *On the Relations between Government and Catholic Church in Poland*, which gave the church also greater access to public broadcasting.

According to this contract, each Polish diocese has the right to organize its own broadcasting station. When in 1993 the National Council of Radio Broadcasting and Television finally began with the organization of the media sector, it had to register already 62 existing church stations (including *Radio Maryja*).

The broadcasting act from December 1992 raised once again political controversies not because of the fact that a decision for a dual system (public and private broadcasting) was taken, but because of two articles, enacting the respect for Christian values, obligatory for private and public media.

Presently the public radio runs three national channels (*PR I, II and III*). In the course of the regionalisation, partly independent local stations were founded, financed only to a minor degree by fees and mainly through commercials.

Three years ago three private stations also received a licence for national dissemination: *Radio RMF-FM* and *Radio Zet* – both backed by foreign capital – and *Radio Maryja*, gaining its countrywide coverage through a great number of local frequencies.

*Radio Maryja* gives us the cue for the description of the three models of Catholic radios in Poland:



## The Purists

*Radio Maryja* is the most well-known representative of the stations we would classify as the *Purists*. The spiritual rector of the enterprise is the Redemptorist Father Tadeusz Rydzyk. After a six-year stay in Germany he seemed to be deeply disappointed by the spiritual misery of the West.<sup>2</sup> In 1991 an Italian diplomat gave him the idea to counter the disliked social developments with his own radio station, which went on the air on the 8th December (day of the Immaculate Conception) the same year.

In February 1994, the Redemptorists received a national licence. Meanwhile *Radio Maryja* broadcasts on some 90 frequencies in more than 80 cities and towns of Poland. Via short wave and two satellites, the station can also be received throughout the rest of Europe and the Americas. 150 collaborators work only in Toruń and Bydgoszcz, another 250 are spread over Poland, all of them on a no-charge basis. *Radio Maryja* is financed by donations from listeners, partly organized in the so-called *Clubs of the Friends of Radio Maryja*.

It is obvious that the Polish station was modelled on the Italian example. However, rumours determine a complete alienation of the Polish daughter from the Italian mother.<sup>3</sup> But the details of the initial funding and the present budget remain Fr. Rydzyk's secret. He repeatedly stated clearly in interviews, that he never talks about money.



The programme of *Radio Maryja* consists mainly of prayers, meditations, rosaries, catechetical education and the Holy Mass. But most popular are the daily live-broadcasts, where the listeners can call in to the studio and discuss current topics such as politics, social events, the church or personal problems.

According to official statistics *Radio Maryja* reaches approximately 4.6% of the Polish population. If we exaggerate somewhat the findings of the surveys, the typical listeners of this religious radio station are women above the age of 50, with a basic educational background. But this audience is a really devoted community, tuning in *Radio Maryja* for several hours daily. Some observers argued that the listeners of *Radio Maryja* consist mainly of a Catholic core-group, seeking a kind of self-affirmation for their own convictions.

However, Fr. Rydzyk's station gains far more publicity through other media. One important factor is his ability to mobilize his listeners to become committed in different political or social initiatives. Other sources of media-excitement are his own actions, for instance in the forecast of the decision about the licencing of national stations, when Fr. Rydzyk appeared in the office of the Commission holding a picture of the Black Madonna of Czenstochowa in his hands. In addition, his audience sent more than 50,000 letters to the Commission. In a press conference, the members of the Commission confirmed that they felt considerably pressured by the station.

During the campaign for the latest presidential elections, even the Polish Bishops' Conference felt obliged to criticize *Radio Maryja* for its unbalanced partisanship along with the spreading of false information and anti-semitic remarks from listeners, which went uncommented on the air.<sup>4</sup> Most recently the Archbishop of Gniezno reprimanded *Radio Maryja* sharply for its high-handed intervention in a catechetical series on the Bible. Fr. Rydzyk removed one of the authors, the theologian Waldemar Chrostowski from the programme. Chrostowski is Vice President of the Episcopal Commission for the Dialogue with Judaism and co-President of the Council for Christian-Jewish relations.. Apparently his remarks concerning the Jewish roots of Christianity went too far from Rydzyk's own convictions.<sup>4a</sup>

Some observers mentioned - in spite of their own convictions - that *Radio Maryja* fulfills a rather important function in the process of democratization in Poland. The listeners would represent quite a large group of extremely conservative people with immense problems of finding their orientation in the rapidly changing Polish society. With *Radio Maryja* they would find a forum to express their aggressive frustration therefore preventing them from violent actions. In their opinion, the station contributes with a kind of psycho-expediency to the social peace in Poland.

*Radio Maryja* is definitely the most widely discussed "phenomenon", but not the only representative of the Purist model.<sup>5</sup> Stations with a strong emphasis on religion and church-related programmes and the overall task of evangelisation are also among the VOX-members, like *Radio Ave Maria* in Jaroslaw or *AVE* in Radom. Almost every one of them has to be financed by the diocese and receive smaller contributions (between 10%-40% of the overall budget) from local listeners. Classical and/or religious music is predominantly broadcast. However, apart from the similarities there is a large number of differences in ownership (i.e. religious orders, parishes, dioceses) as well as financial and personnel resources. In this group we find stations with an annual budget ranging from US \$ 4,000.- up to US\$ 80,000.-. The number of permanent staff extends from 5 to 15 employees and the daily broadcasting hours vary from 3 to 24. Unfortunately no figures are available concerning the number of listeners or their social profiles.

## The CCC's

In the group labelled CCC's - for commercial, Catholic, competitive - *Radio Maryja* is not considered a competitor. Their relation towards this religious station is rather indicated by a co-existence without many points of contact.

Typical listeners

Actions

Criticism

Vox-Purists





The CCC's compete with the secular radio-scene, trying to meet the plurality of the every-day-life of the people. They claim to have also those listeners who are otherwise not (yet or no longer) reached by the church. As the Archbishop of Gdansk put it: "Catholics are not people who only sit in church; they are also business-people, politicians, teachers and all the rest. We want to broadcast for these people."

These radio programmes are not uniform but could be submitted under the format Adult Contemporary, trying to reach listeners between the ages of 15 and 49. Pop and Rock are the dominant music-formats. Some stations broadcast more soft and melodious titles. Comprehending the changing role of radio as an accompanying media, they want to be the No. 1 during the working hours in offices and on factory premises (i.e. Radio Puls in Gliwice or Radio eL in Legnica). Some of the CCC's have managed to become the most popular radio stations in their local regions.

It is in this group that we find the largest Catholic stations (i.e. Radio Plus, Puls, eL, AS, Gorzów etc.). But nevertheless, we have again submitted under this model a wide range of different stations, reaching from the rural farmer's radio in Lipiany to the highly professionalized market leaders in urban regions, all of them broadcasting for 24 hours. Clear emphasis is laid on local and regional news programmes. Some of the stations maintain their own social service departments.

Some of the CCC's received financial help from abroad for the implementation of their stations, others started with nothing more than the trust of their diocesan Bishop. The running costs are fully covered through advertising. Depending on the attractivity and the resources of their region, the annual turnover ranges from a few thousand, up to far more than one million Dollars.

Compared to the national hit radios, the capital resources are rather modest. Therefore some depend on (foreign) financiers for necessary investments, not least because of the still weak economic situation in Poland. Additionally, a breakdown in the Polish advertising market recently showed<sup>6</sup> that radio receives only the smallest share of 7.5% of publicity expenditure, of which the national public radio takes around a quarter (TV: 62.3%, newspapers: 16.1% and magazines 14.1%). The dominating position of TV is also statuable in favour of the audience: During the course of an average day, every Polish citizen watches television for 5.5 hours, not considering time spent with video-films.

*Radio Plus* in Gdansk seems to be the station which followed most uncompromisingly the competitive commercialisation of their station. During the week, they broadcast some five hours of religious programmes. Their style is fully adapted to the overall programme profile. Even the Archbishop of Gdansk has to condense his "Loud thinking" (a weekly feuilleton) to three minutes. But his broadcast is said to be extremely popular, as is the programme where a women plays the role of an average citizen, discussing quite provocatively theological problems with a priest.

Other CCC's still have longer and more traditional religious programmes, broadcast mainly during the evening hours, then changing the music profile and formation of their programme.

## The compromisers

Here the distinction towards the stations submitted in the group of the *Compromisers* becomes fluid. Unlike the *Purists* and the CCC's - which we could consider as format radios - most of the compromisers offer a sort of "mixed programming", or a bit of everything for everybody. This concept was developed by the former BBC Managing Director, Lord J.C.W. Reith, already in the early 30s, disappearing as a programme philosophy in the course of the 60s in Great Britain and elsewhere in Western Europe,<sup>7</sup> but still popular among radio responsables of the church in Central and Eastern Europe. Mixed programming offers a diverse range of programme materials during the course

of the day or the week (i.e. sport, religion, different sorts of music, entertainment), catering for different social functions (education, information, entertainment), and for different sectional interests within the listening public (children, women, businessmen, farmers, fishermen, etc.). Even the special Sunday programmes offered by most of the Polish compromisers, consisting mainly of religious services, talks and classical music, go back to the early times of the BBC, then called the "Reith Sunday".<sup>8</sup>

Most of the stations submitted under *Compromisers* try to finance their station through the two sources: commercials and donor listeners. Others have a mixed income structure consisting of commercial income and contributions from the diocese.

The ratings of these kind of Catholic radios in their own local environment is quite different. One decisive factor seems to be the number of local competitors. *Radio Mariackie* in Krakow, for example, during the week reaches approximately 7% of the people in the highly competitive Krakovian region, whereas Radio Podlasia in Siedlce, a rural area east of Warsaw, where no other local competitor exists, is tuned in to by more than one-third of the population in the region, and more than half of the people from the city of Siedlce.

## Many voices - one VOX

All three of the above described models of Catholic radio stations are found among the 33 member-stations of VOX. This organization was founded in September 1993, as an umbrella, meeting the following tasks:

- collection and distribution of news and other programmes;
- technical and juridical advice for new stations;
- supporting the planning and production of programmes;
- training of personnel,
- searching for new financial sources.

With the help of the US Bishops' Conference, the central studio *Square* was opened up in Spring last year. *Square* is planned as the central coordinating point of a satellite network, connecting all the other stations to each other.

However - up to now - the realisation of the statuted aims and tasks has remained rudimentary. Too many different "voices" seem to formulate the single VOX. But how could the centre meet the totally different needs of the branches? And how could the roof remain solid if the carrying beams don't see the advantage of supporting it?

Most of the VOX members see the necessity to follow a more common model of member radios to create joint services. It seems to be worthwhile to repeat the different argumentations, because the Polish debate is in many respects typical of the discussions about Catholic radios worldwide:

The CCC's state that the one national Purist - namely *Radio Maryja* - fully covers the needs of the faithful for additional religious services and catechesis. All the others should try to mirror the plural needs of Catholics and should even leave the Catholic "ghetto" to spread the information about the church and the manifestations of the Christian faith in today's life among wider, especially younger, sections of society.

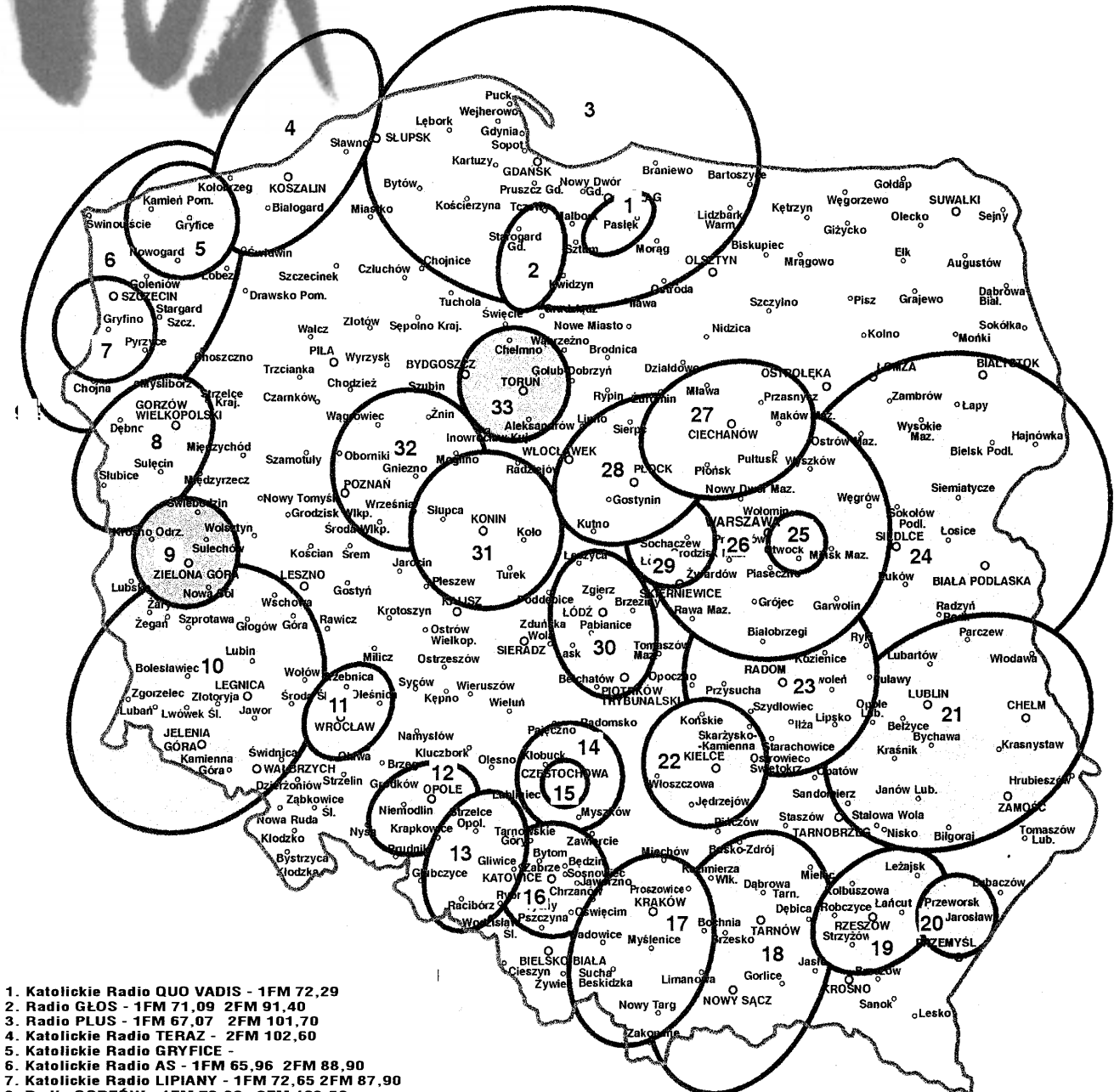
One pre-requisite to fulfill these tasks is not to lose the competition with the secular media. This implicates not only a high degree of professionalization, going along with the respect for the special usage of radio as a mass media by the listeners. Inside that group, the reduction of religious broadcasts to a few minutes is not so much seen as a problem of length, but rather one of professional skills. Not all, but many, topics may be covered in 1 to 3 minutes, and more complicated themes could be covered for example by the print-media or by face-to-face communication.



"No false sentimentality, pastor! Without sponsors, TV transmissions of worship services are impossible to finance these days."

Source: Gerhard Mester, Deutsches Allgemeines Sonntagsblatt/Link May 1996

# OGÓLNOPOLSKIE STOWARZYSZENIE ROZGŁOŚNI KATOLICKICH



1. Katolickie Radio QUO VADIS - 1FM 72,29
2. Radio GŁOS - 1FM 71,09 2FM 91,40
3. Radio PLUS - 1FM 67,07 2FM 101,70
4. Katolickie Radio TERAZ - 2FM 102,60
5. Katolickie Radio GRZYFICE -
6. Katolickie Radio AS - 1FM 65,96 2FM 88,90
7. Katolickie Radio LIPIANY - 1FM 72,65 2FM 87,90
8. Radio GORZÓW - 1FM 70,30 2FM 103,50
9. Radio ZIELONA GÓRA - (uruchomienie w najbliższym czasie)
10. Radio L - 1FM 67,82 1FM 69,86 2FM 95,70
11. Katolickie Radio RODZINA - 2FM 92,00
12. Radio GÓRA ŚW. ANNY - 2FM 107,90
13. Katolickie Radio PULS - 1FM 72,44 2FM 96,10
14. Radio JASNA GÓRA - 2FM 100,60
15. Katolicka Rozgłośnia Radiowa FIAT - 1FM 67,01 2FM 94,70
16. Radio Archidiecezji Katowickiej - 2FM 107,60
17. Radio MARIACKIE Kraków - 1FM 70,76 2FM 87,80
18. Radio DOBRA NOWINA - 1FM 69,65 2FM 103,60 2FM 101,20
19. Radio VIA - 2FM 103,80

20. Radio AVE MARIA - 2FM 87,80
21. Katolickie Radio Lublin - 2FM 87,90
22. Świętokrzyskie Radio JEDNOŚĆ - 1FM 71,95 2FM 98,00
23. Katolickie Radio Radomskie AVE - 1FM 71,99
24. Katolickie Radio Podlasia - 2FM 101,70
25. Katolickie Radio WARSZAWA - 1FM 70,70 2FM 106,20
26. Katolickie Radio JÓZEF - 2FM 96,50
27. Katolickie Radio CIECHANÓW - 1FM 65,90 2FM 103,90
28. Katolickie Radio PŁOCK - 1FM 65,99 2FM 104,30
29. Radio NIEPOKALANÓW - 2FM 102,70
30. Radio EMAUS - 1FM 66,68 2FM 101,10
31. Radio ŚW. MAKSYMILIAN - 2FM 105,10
32. Radio ŚW. WOJCIECH - 2FM 89,50
33. Parafialne Radio TORUŃ - (uruchomienie w najbliższym czasie)

Most CCC's see neither the need nor the chance to finance the radio stations in the long run through donations or subventions from the local church. They have the deepest interest in creating an effective network, strengthening their own performance by using the very best of every single member. Especially in the field of the advertising market, where leading world-wide experts see the amalgamation of wide-ranging networks as one of the key factors for success in the market. The advantages are obvious: a larger audience is more attractive for possible customers and the media-planning could be simplified.<sup>9</sup> Some CCC stations have already developed quite professional departments for public relations and the acquisition of commercials. They would put their know-how at the disposal of all other members, but state clearly that there is no chance of "selling" such an inhomogeneous conglomerate of stations having no common image, a similar format or target audience.

In this discussion about different profiles, the *compromisers* are considered an almost extinct species, which will not be able to meet the challenges of the tightening market.

Some of the *compromisers* seem to be still undecided. They emphasize their role as a local radio, which should serve all different groups and interests in their own region. As long as they are unique and successful, like *Radio Podlasia*, they don't feel the need to change, but in some cases the surveys already show a clear loss of younger listeners.

The *purists* do not consider the CCC's as Catholic. In their view, the traditional services of the church should also be the content of the radio station, including the pastoral work. But they do not want *Radio Maryja* to be the only representative of this format. In contrast, the CCC's would respond that these kind of radios only reach the - anyway - practicing faithful. Concentration on the own group would not fulfill the tasks of the radio as a tool of social communications in a given society, as stated in many papers after the II Vatican Council.

On the whole, we see that all arguments are bound by three different factors, taking into account the picture representing the church in society, the type and number of people reached by the Catholic stations, as well as the way in which the financial basis is secured.

The VOX-network, covering the vast majority of Catholic radios in Poland, represents somehow the general discussion about the fundamental philosophies of Catholic radio stations elsewhere.

Whatever the future will bring, any agreement on common positions or performances will depend on the Polish Bishops who are - in most cases - the owners of the stations and therefore the decisive factor for the concrete programme philosophies.

However, the first step in the direction of cooperation has just been taken by the decision to produce a joint news service, which will be taken over by almost all members of VOX - the first moments when VOX will really be heard as one voice...

<sup>1</sup> Malgoscha Gebel, SZ, 24.09.1993, p. 22

<sup>2</sup> Ilsa Kowohl, *Communicatio Socialis*, Vol. 1/2 1995, p. 18

<sup>3</sup> Radio Maryja was originally founded in Bolzano, Italy, but is meanwhile found on almost all continents

<sup>4</sup> Funk-Korrespondenz No. 7, 17.02.1995, p. 18

<sup>4a</sup> KNA, ID, No. 37, 12. Sept. 1996, p. 8

<sup>5</sup> Should there be no other remarks, the following information is founded on CAMECO's research

<sup>6</sup> Adamowski, Janusz, in: the BULLETIN 1/96, p. 32/33

<sup>7</sup> Crisell, Andrew: *Understanding Radio*, Methuen, London, New York 1986, p. 19 ff

<sup>8</sup> as above, p. 24

<sup>9</sup> Compare for example the bi-annual report of the international IP-group, cited in *Medienspiegel* No. 17/April 1996, p. 4

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