

Original article

The press officer in conditions of military and police operations

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INFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the characteristics of the service of a press officer of the Armed Forces and the Police. The article discusses the role of press spokesmen as a media liaison in the field of information, responsible for creating an image and shaping the relations of the uniformed formation represented with the media. The role of the Military Public Communication Service in shaping the information policy and the image of the Armed Forces is also presented. Furthermore, the role of police spokesmen, who play a particular role in shaping a positive image of the police force and overall public security, is presented.

KEYWORDS

press officer, the media, military operations, police operations



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Introduction

The position and associated role of the press officer are presented with respect to both military and police operations. This officer represents the press service responsible for the relations between the unit they represent and media representatives. The importance of press teams and, therefore, of press officers is growing in the age of a pluralistic, democratic society, which expects ever faster access to growing information resources. Within the Polish Armed Forces and the Police, the importance of entities in charge of shaping relations with the media has grown immensely. This is because both the military and the police are essential for the proper functioning of the state, while in a context of growing importance of the right to information, social expectations are growing, including the demand to first-hand information. Data of particular importance includes, among others, information resources on military and police operations. Therefore, press teams within the Polish Armed Forces and the Police, and, above all, the way they perform their duties and their social reception, are particularly important for ensuring the normalized functioning of the community.

The role of the press officer

The press officer is a term used to describe a spokesman working in the structures where the terminology used allows for the use of the definition of “officer”. This term became so popular that spokesmen were identified with press officers even in other formations. The fully correct use of this term includes, however, press officers operating in uniformed services and entities, in which also other positions, especially standard ones, are covered by the definition of an “officer”. A press officer is certainly a member of the army and the Police. They play the same role as the press officer in other uniformed services.

The role of a press officer is to organize contact between the services they represent and the media. The press officer creates the image of the formation and answers journalists’ questions. In this way, they shape the relationship between the service they represent and the media and, as necessary delegates, they participate in the flow of information. Depending on the circumstances, they may fully or only partially relieve other entities representing the same service of their reporting duties (*vis-à-vis* journalists). They should provide concrete information and be open to questions from the media as far as they relate to the formation, but must not provide information that is secret and therefore confidential.

The press officer is responsible for choosing the information resources which will be divulged to the media and, therefore, to the public. They are obligated to adhere to the strategy of the formation they represent in terms of providing information to the media. Moreover, they organize contacts with the media, influencing what data will be made available to the outside world and, as a result, will go beyond the formation. The press officer co-creates the data disclosure strategy together with their superiors. They enjoy considerable freedom of action in terms of methods of presenting information and overseeing media relations. They have less freedom in determining the strategy of determining the scope of the data to be shared. This is because the press officer must comply with regulations on the protection of classified information as well as other guidelines, including the internal press team’s code of conduct.

The importance of the press officer is demonstrated to a large extent by their performance of the functions of an entity representing the unit with the outside world. A press officer has a significant influence on shaping public opinion, because, by sharing information with the media, they are aware that it will be made public. They communicate messages relating to the performance of the tasks of the service they represent to the media. These press releases are arranged, on the one hand, in order not to cause undesirable social reactions and, on the other hand, to answer the questions raised by journalists. The Press Officer thus enforces the right of access to information held by the recipients of media communications, and respect for confidential data which should not be communicated to the media, in particular in view of the risk of publication of information whose confidentiality is a factor in the success of the tasks carried out by the formation represented by the press officer.

Development of regulations governing the work of press officers

The first complementary regulations covering the principles of operation of press officers in government administration entities in the conditions of Polish democracy appeared at the beginning of the 21st century, with the creation of the Act of 6 September 2001 on access to public information [1]. The new regulations also covered the Ministry of National Defense,

which is responsible for the functioning of the army. Regulations governing access to public information have introduced, on the one hand, protection of information which, in the public interest, should not be divulged, and, on the other, an obligation to inform the public of activities carried out by public authorities. Thus, the protection of information which should not reach the general public was improved, and, at the same time, the supervision of the functioning of state offices by the society, which gained significant prerogatives in access to public data, was increased.

One of the most significant manifestations of the changes determined by the introduction of regulations on the protection of access to public information has become the increased interest of journalists in public affairs. The situation which occurred at that time is particularly construed as allowing journalists to have a much greater insight into public affairs than in the period preceding the implementation of the legislation. If journalists had previously taken an interest in public affairs, they had no legally binding reason to consistently demand information on such matters. The introduction of the regulations systematized and broadened the possibilities associated with access to information for media, and thus – members of the society – in the manner of performing tasks by state offices. For offices and entities supervised by them, this circumstance has become a factor in the need to improve relations with the media. Therefore, the importance of spokesmen, press teams and press officers, responsible for overseeing the contacts of individual offices and individuals with media representatives, has increased.

In public life, the importance of openness was emphasized. Journalists have been given the opportunity to ask more exhaustive questions (to bodies representing state administration) and to request answers that are able to satisfy the public's right to information. Informing members of the public about public matters, in particular about such important matters as military or police operations, has become an important manifestation of changes in the approach to relations between the state administration and the public. The changes were continued, which resulted in the adoption of Regulation of the Council of Ministers of 8 January 2002 on the organization and tasks of press officers in government administration offices [2]. The new provisions referred, among others, to the Act of 26 January 1984 – Press Law [3]. They began to systematize the work of press officers in central offices. They specified the tasks of such spokesmen, who then, on the basis of further development of provisions concerning the protection of the right to information, also referred to the tasks reserved for other similar structures, including press officers in the army and press teams in the Police. The tasks of the press officers included: providing information on the activities of individual units, organizing contacts with the media, explaining the reasons and the progress of initiatives undertaken by individuals, representing positions in matters related to the work of the entity represented by a given spokesperson, commenting on events falling within the competence of the entity, responding to media inquiries, issuing press releases, as well as responding to media materials.

The adopted legal norms covering the rules for the functioning of press officers in public structures have allowed for the implementation of further legislation in this area. These provisions were of a precise nature and began to be introduced separately for each public entity.

The press officer in conditions of military operations

The work of the press officer in the army was comprehensively regulated by Decision No. 298/MON of 1 August 2006 on press service in the Ministry of National Defense [4]. Subsequently, Decision No 171/MON [5] and Decision No 198/MON were adopted [6]. Currently, Decision No. 47/MON of the Minister of National Defense of 26 March 2019 on the principles of implementing the information policy and on functioning of the public communication service in the Ministry of National Defense, is legally binding [7].

The press service of the Ministry of National Defense was created by the adoption of the first standards for regulating the work of the press officer in the army. Particular importance was then attached to the Press and Information Department, which began to determine the structure of departments and press sections separated in Polish military units. The Department was also appointed to designate the powers and duties of press officers. The larger pool of positions in the new press service has been taken up by military officers with the necessary qualifications and predispositions. Only a few units, such as military universities, have progressed from supervision to direct management of the Minister of National Defense. In these units, the positions of press officers were allowed to be performed by civilian military personnel. By law, the press officers of military units became co-authors of the information policy of the Ministry of National Defense. This enabled the press officer to communicate freely with the unit commander as well as with other actors deciding on what information should be communicated to the public.

The standards regulating the work of the press officer in the army were gradually improved. Therefore, Decision No. 203/MON of 31 May 2011 on press service in the Ministry of National Defense was adopted. As a result of the implementation of new regulations, the press officer in the army became responsible for: creating the image of the army (by actively informing the public about current issues it is involved in, whereas the press officer was obligated to provide this information both through traditional media and through websites; this information concerned issues involving the operation of a given organizational entity in the army, and at the same time – had to be within the competence of the press officer representing this entity, i.e. a unit or cell), performing analyses, both current and cyclical, concerning the media (especially in the field of information relevant to military commanders), developing projects devoted to the perception of the Polish armed forces in the media, inspiring media representatives (in consultation with the Director of the Press and Information Department) – in relation to the most important initiatives carried out by the unit or cell within the army, organizing press conferences and meetings with representatives of the media, preparing military commanders for such events, arranging the accommodation of journalists in the vicinity of military bases, assisting journalists in organizing their stay in such units, answering questions from media representatives, as well as responding to press criticism, acting as the military commander's representative in the media (for information competency), updating websites of the Armed Forces in connection with the publication of information involving the represented entity, preparing the resources for press releases on any training projects, and handling the effective flow of internal information (for timely and relevant communications to commanders, soldiers and employees of the army on undertakings in the Ministry of National Defense and the Armed Forces, especially on decisions taken by the management of the Ministry regarding the conditions of performance of work and service, based on data received from the press department at a higher level), building a photographic and film

database of a military entity represented by a press officer, submitting documentation related to the database to the Press and Information Department, sharing it with individual units or organizations within the Ministry, Conducting training courses for soldiers and employees on the rules of publishing information, as well as its protection against leakage (training with the participation of people participating in military exercises, after consulting the training program with the Director of the Press and Information Department), management of press service staff to shape the press centers of military exercises, including international profile, dissemination of newsletters among eligible entities, joint preparation of information with the Warsaw Military Publishing Institute, as well as participation in the crisis communication system.

The exhaustive presentation of the tasks of the press officer has made it possible to improve their work and, in particular, to improve the functioning of the army, which has given it not only a body responsible for the flow of information concerning the army, both in the external and internal environment, but also a structure entrusted with a high level of competence. It has been noted that the position of a press officer in the army is particularly important and its importance increases in the face of new challenges and extensive civilization transformations.

The regulations governing the work of a press officer in the army were updated by Decision No. 47/MON of the Minister of National Defense of 26 March 2019 on the principles of implementing the information policy and functioning of the public communication service in the Ministry of National Defence. This decision adjusted the functioning of the position of press officer in the army to the new needs related to the operation of the army, as well as to the changing conditions of information flow.

One of the important regulations introduced by the Decision was the definition of the concept of information policy implemented by the Ministry of National Defense. This policy was regulated as a total of all activities (undertaken in the ministry of national defense), including informing the public, as well as internal communication about the matters of the Polish Armed Forces, and also about defense, while time creating a positive image of the Armed Forces through the use of available means of social communication, including the mass media. The most important goal of the information policy implemented by the Ministry of National Defense was to satisfy the need of the recipients for information, i.e. of members of the society, while at the same time gaining understanding from them and gaining public acceptance of the goals and undertakings pursued by the army. In order to improve the implementation of this policy, the public communication service of the Ministry of National Defense and the Armed Forces has been isolated as a separate unit.

Decision No. 47/MON of the Minister of National Defense of 26 March 2019 defined social communication as a tool responsible for communication processes organized in the field of public communication service, designed to ensure public understanding and support for the projects of the ministry aimed to actively and reliably satisfy the information expectations of the community, as well to create a positive image of the Polish soldier, the Armed Forces and the Ministry. The decision stipulated that commanders, directors, heads of units or commanding officers of organizational units are responsible for the implementation of the information policy in their respective organizational units.

By virtue of the Decision, commanders carry out the information policy independently as well as through the communication service staff under the command of the commanding officer. A commander speaks out only within the confines of the organizational entity they represent

and has certain powers attributed to their position. Either independently or through subordinate press officers, they appoint the staff who will appear in the media. The Commander provides the Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense with data, analyses and studies relevant to the information policy as soon as possible. Planning the functioning of subordinate units, they take into account the leading tasks of informing the public opinion when these tasks result from the objectives of the Minister. The Commander creates appropriate conditions for the operation of the public communication service, in particular by providing the space to work, as well as appropriate equipment, hardware, software, and financial and organizational conditions for the performance of tasks.

The Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense is responsible for setting out detailed rules and implementing the department's information policy, and in particular for issuing guidelines and recommendations covering the information policy, exercising substantive authority over the work of the public communication service, coordinating the implementation of tasks in the field of information policy, determining which representatives of units will participate in media appearances, in cooperation with commanders and press spokesmen, execution and supervision of information campaigns in connection with important tasks, securing the rights of commanders and the public communication service, organizing training (both for entities with managerial positions and for commanders at various levels in the framework of media relations, soldiers, civil service employees and organizational units, performing tasks for the public communication service, recruits, candidates and entities performing duties outside Poland and in domestic military posts with international organizations or supranational military structures, experts dedicated to participation in media appearances, other personnel of the Armed Forces, depending on the needs and capacities, and even journalists pursuing the career as correspondents in areas of peace and stabilization missions), will be responsible for determining the requirements for the social communication service and determining the qualifications which are deemed necessary at particular levels, as well as for providing substantive opinions on candidates who aspire to work in the public communication service.

It was assumed that the public communication service operating in the Polish Armed Forces performs tasks within the framework of information policy in times of peace, crisis or war. These tasks are carried out in accordance with the standards and priorities set by the Minister or Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense, in particular by providing honest information to the public (as well as to soldiers and employees of the Ministry of National Defense) regarding their qualifications, state defense matters and initiatives of the Ministry of National Defense. Tasks carried out in the implementation of the information policy of the public communication service also include: organizing the relations between the command and management bodies at various levels of the Ministry of National Defense and the media, informing the Ministry's management, in accordance with their qualifications, about the social perception of the challenges of state defense, planning, as well as organizing cooperation with entities representing the media, press services of government and local administration bodies and non-governmental organizations in order to present information to the fullest possible extent, including through official websites and social media profiles of the Ministry and organizational units of the Ministry of National Defense. The Military Public Communication Service also handles cooperation and exchange of experiences with the press entities of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the European Union and other international

organizations, as well as with the armed forces of individual countries. The Military Public Communication Service also takes part in the planning and organization of military training devoted to media service, creation of a database of photographic and audiovisual materials of the unit, and performs other tasks in the field of information policy of the Ministry of National Defense. Therefore, the Public Communication Service performs complementary information policy of the Polish Armed Forces and forms conditions for the mass media to perform their functions, tasks and missions, also in relation to military operations.

The full-time public communication service is represented by the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defence, public communication entities operating in the General Staff of the Polish Army, as well as in organizational units of the Armed Forces, personnel of the public communication service of Polish military contingents and Polish military units (PKW/PJW), as well as by the personnel of branches or subdivisions performing tasks outside our country. Individual structures may be liquidated, modified or new ones may be created, provided that they are approved by the Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense. Non-permanent positions appointed to carry out information policy tasks may be also created. These positions are supervised by a full-time spokesman of the superior organizational unit of the Ministry of National Defense. All personnel of the public communication structures of the Polish Armed Forces should display high skills in communication with others, the ability to speak freely and substantially, both orally and in writing, have experience or knowledge of public relations, journalism or social sciences, be skilled in communicating through the Internet, as well as speak English. They should also have completed training in public communication and media relations.

Spokesmen under the direct authority of the commanders enjoy the status of experts and advisors in the information policy of the Ministry of National Defense. Press officers, together with the staff of the public communication service, perform press tasks and undertake media initiatives only in relation to the organizational units of the Ministry of National Defense they represent. They implement the guidelines and recommendations of the Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense. Press officers, as well as communications staff, are required to inform their superiors about the contents of press released which shape the perception of departmental units, and to plan and supervise activities that enable them to communicate important initiatives and decisions to the public. The military spokesperson, in consultation with the commander, keeps the senior press officer informed about the more important challenges, initiatives and tasks on which the public wants to learn as much as possible. They explain army events concerning the current activities of the units of the Ministry of National Defense. In consultation with the commander, the spokesperson immediately informs the director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense, if the data is beyond the scope of the spokesperson's powers, can have a significant influence on the perception of the department or is relevant to the operation of the Armed Forces.

According to the adopted standards, the authority over any personnel of the public communication service in Polish military contingents and Polish military units (PKW/PJW) outside the territory of Poland acts as the spokesperson of the Operational Command of individual Types of the Armed Forces, and is thus in charge of creating planning, organisational and commanding documents for the Operational Commander of the Armed Forces, organizing the work of the public communication service in the Polish military contingents and Polish military units (PKW/PJW) and establishing the rules of providing information on the performance

of PKW/PJW tasks in the mission area, security of the army participating in the performance of the mission, opinions on the activities of the PKW/PJW outside Poland by foreign media, as well as on special circumstances (dead or injured soldiers, accidents and disasters) during missions, based on the norms of informing recipients in crisis circumstances, in consultation with the Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense.

Full-time public communication structures within PKW/PJW, branches and subdivisions performing tasks outside Poland, as well as positions within the public communication service in domestic military posts with international organizations and military structures are filled – after obtaining an opinion from the Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense – by soldiers and employees of the Ministry of Defense who have experience in working in positions of the public communication service in Poland or who have received adequate training. These positions are adjusted to the characteristics of tasks and needs and are agreed with the Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense. The press officer is entitled to at least one vacancy.

Commanders of organizational units of the Ministry, operating outside the territory of Poland, are obliged to inform the Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense as soon as possible whether significant materials covering the functioning of the Armed Forces as well as the state defence appeared in the media in the country where the army was stationed. In the interests of the security of military operations, the tasks performed and their security, as well as the safety of those involved in their execution, commanders have the right to enforce restrictions on access to information. The scale of these limitations, referred to as partial or total, should be adapted to the nature and severity of the risks, and thus ensure the effective execution of the operations. Journalists have the right to participate in military operations and their personal security is no reason why they should be excluded from such participation. The rules of delegating journalists to the Polish military contingents and Polish military units (PKW/PJW) are supervised by the Operational Commander of the Armed Forces.

Each soldier and employee of the department should maintain the proper image and good name of the department, especially in relations with entities representing the media, as well as in the scope of any information activity using the Internet or social media. If the media are interested, soldiers and employees of the department have the right, provided that the commander's consent is given, to inform media representatives, provided that they are authorised to do so. In their relations with entities representing the media and in the publication of information on the Internet and social media, both soldiers and employees of the department are obliged to protect classified information, as well as data related to the security of the Armed Forces. As soon as possible, they provide relevant information the media declare their interest in inquire about to the staff of the public communication service of the organizational unit of the Ministry. Substantive assistance in relations with entities representing the media is provided by the public communication service.

As regulated by the Decision, the Commanders of individual units issue accreditations. These are permits to carry out journalistic work by authorised persons. Accreditations for entities representing foreign media are issued by the head of the department's organizational unit after consultation with the Military Counterintelligence Service, as well as after informing the Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense. Accreditation may be granted if the journalist holds a valid journalist's card or authorization from the editorial office, together with the personal data of the authorized journalist, the expiry date of

the document, its subject matter and the scope of journalistic activities. Foreign journalists should also receive a positive opinion of the Military Counterintelligence Service.

Key information concerning the Ministry of National Defense is presented on the website, as well as on the Ministry's profiles in social media, supervised by the Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense. All organizational units should have their own websites and can have social media profiles. New websites must be reviewed by the Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense. If these guidelines are not complied with, the Director has the right to close the website or social media profile. The spokesperson for the relevant departmental organization is responsible for the content of the website and social media profiles. The website of the Ministry of National Defence is placed under the authority of the Director of the Operations Center of the Ministry of National Defense.

Press officer in police operations

The press service in the Police was established on 10 April 1929, together with the creation of the Press Department at the Central Headquarters of the State Police [8]. In 1926, the rules of shaping relations between the State Police and the press began to be unified. The first standardized standards of cooperation concerned speeches, publicizing police positions, as well as sending information letters. Later on, telephone communication and the associated relations developed. The function of the spokesman was established in the Police in the 1990s.

Currently, the work of police spokesmen is regulated by Disposition No. 12 of the Chief of Police of 27 January 2018 amending the Disposition on the forms and methods of press and information activity in the Police. Pursuant to the Disposition, press officers cooperate with press teams staffed with officers and civilians. Press teams communicate the official stance of the police to the media, are responsible for shaping its image, create the assumptions of its information policy, set out the information rules in which the police participate, try to protect police undertakings in order to avoid leakage of information disrupting the course of proceedings, investigations and inquiries, shape the reputation of the police service, monitor and analyze media data about the police and respond to any information obtained. Therefore, cooperation between the police and the media is nearly entirely carried out through the press service. Officers authorized to provide information on the site were obligated not to disclose sensitive information which could interfere with law enforcement activities.

In Police activities, the press service is a platform for cooperation between the spokesman for the Chief of Police, the spokesman for Voivodeship and Capital Police Commanders, as well as the press officers of the poviats, city and district police units. This structure is to ensure a positive public perception of police activities and to form a sense of security.

Conclusions

Nowadays, neither the Polish Armed Forces nor the Police are able to function effectively without the support of the press service. The importance of press service has therefore grown immensely. Press officers are responsible for a growing number of tasks, which is a result of the dynamic development of new media and forms of communication, as well as the growing demand for information from a democratic, pluralistic society. However, the right to information cannot take precedence over the right to secure the regularity of operations of the

military and the police, therefore, the protection of these operations allows for the exclusion of the right to information if it is necessary to ensure their success. Both in the army and the police, the press officer currently plays an important role. Its importance is expected to increase in the light of new challenges in the field of information policy of key security actors.

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Conflict of interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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Biographical note

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Oficer prasowy w warunkach operacji wojskowych i działań policyjnych

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł przedstawia charakterystykę służby oficera prasowego Sił Zbrojnych i Policji. Poruszono w nim rolę rzeczników prasowych jako podmiotu odpowiedzialnego za współpracę z przedstawicielami mediów w zakresie informacyjnym jak również tworzącego wizerunek oraz kształtującej relacje reprezentowanej formacji mundurowej z mediami. Przedstawiono również rolę Wojskowej Służby Komunikacji Społecznej w kształtowaniu polityki informacyjnej i wizerunku Sił Zbrojnych. Ponadto zaprezentowano rolę rzeczników prasowych policji, którzy odgrywają szczególną rolę w kształtowaniu pozytywnego wizerunku służby policyjnej i formowaniu bezpieczeństwa publicznego.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE oficer prasowy , media, operacje wojskowe, działania policyjne

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