

Maciej HARTLIŃSKI

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn
ORCID: 0000-0003-3099-5806

Jakub KLEPAŃSKI

University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn
ORCID: 0000-0002-3470-7288

Political Leaders on the COVID-19 Pandemic: Analysis of the Sejm Discourse

Abstract: Utterances of political leaders participating in a parliamentary debate, especially in crisis situations, are of exceptional significance. The aim of the study is to analyse positions and declarations of political leaders towards the COVID-19 pandemic in Poland as regards politicians' speeches made in the Sejm. Quantitative and qualitative analyses were performed on 504 speeches made by chairpersons of parties and parliamentary clubs and circles. The analysis showed that the issue of COVID-19, although it was the most important problem for Poles for many months, did not receive as much attention from political leaders in the Sejm. The leaders of opposition groups criticised the government and called for action. In contrast, the leaders of ruling parties' coalition did not actively participate in the Sejm discourse.

Key words: political leaders, parliamentary speech, political discourse, COVID-19

1. Introduction

The words of political leaders gain significance in consequential, emergency or crisis situations. The pandemic in Poland and the world was certainly one of such moments. Faced with great social and economic challenges and, above all, threat to their health and life, citizens and the media paid special attention to positions and declarations of key politicians. It is thus worth getting to know the views of the most important people in the country that were voiced from the Sejm rostrum. The more so as they provide insight into various challenges met by citizens and institutions, as well as solutions and actions to be taken.

Speaking in the parliament is of particular importance because what is said there reflects the attitude and views of an MP, a party representative and a representative of the voting public. Formal procedures and a special course of action are followed, which is tantamount to proceeding according to a prescribed formula. It is the core of parliamentary activity in a democratic state for an MP to present their position and enter a debate with representatives of other political parties. This provides space for deliberation, clash of views as well as ensuring room for justification and explanation of political decisions. Moreover, the parliamentary discourse provides a different framework than daily television interviews, radio statements or social media coverage. Although the latter are gaining in importance in public perception as well as among

scholars, due to its institutional significance a classic parliamentary speech is still superior to daily press conferences.

So far, the research on speeches by political leaders in Poland from the perspective of political science is interesting but unsubstantial. Jarosław Kaczyński's speeches (Żukiewicz, 2009; Zimny, Żukiewicz, 2010), including his Sejm speeches (Schmidt, 2013), have been the main focus of research, while one study provided a comparative analysis of speeches by a few political leaders (Hartliński, Klepański, 2017). In addition to the above contributions, publications on political discourse proved to be cognitively relevant and useful in planning the research, especially those that contain analyses on similar matters (Siewierska-Chmaj, 2006; Radiukiewicz, 2017; Kwiatkowska, 2017). Naturally, reading theoretical studies on parliamentary discourse in Poland was also an important step to prepare well to this study as this contributed to a better understanding of the issue and outline of the research process (Laskowska, 2004; Majkowska, 2011; Majkowska, 2012a; Majkowska, 2012b; Majkowska, 2013; Podemski, 2013; Fras, 2005; Rittel, 2003; Brzezińska, Burgoński, Gierycz, 2018).

The aim of the study is to analyse the positions and declarations of Polish political leaders towards the COVID-19 pandemic present in the Sejm discourse. The main research goals are to analyse, systematise and compare the positions and declarations of political leaders. It is also important to show them from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, which will facilitate gaining a fuller picture of what is said by the most important politicians in Poland. For this purpose, two main research questions were formulated. Firstly, how often did particular political leaders speak on the pandemic? Secondly, what positions and declarations did they put forward in parliamentary discourse?

The subject of the analysis is oral utterances of MPs performing leadership roles in their parties.¹ The analysis was conducted on speeches given by 18 leaders of all political parties represented in the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of the 9th term, as well as the chairpersons of parliamentary clubs and parliamentary circles. Only the speeches delivered when they held their leadership position were included.

The research material consists of 504 parliamentary speeches (including statements and topical questions) delivered from the 7th to the 20th sitting of the Sejm of the 9th term – that is all sittings that took place during the eight months when the pandemic unfolded in Poland.

¹ Jarosław Kaczyński (Chairman – Law and Justice); Jarosław Gowin (Chairman – Agreement); Zbigniew Ziobro (chairman of United Poland); Ryszard Terlecki (chairman of the parliamentary club – Law and Justice); Borys Budka (chairman of Civic Platform, chairman of the parliamentary club – Civic Coalition); Cezary Tomczyk (chairman of the parliamentary club – Civic Coalition from 25 september 2020 to 22 July 2021); Adam Szałapka (chairman of Modern); Barbara Nowacka (chairman of Polish Initiative); Małgorzata Tracz (women co-chairman of Green Party); Krzysztof Gawkowski (chairman of the parliamentary club – Left); Włodzimierz Czarzasty (chairman of Left Democratic Alliance); Adrian Zandberg (one of the leaders of the Left coalition, co-founder and the most recognizable politician of the Together party, in the parliamentary elections he obtained the best election result among all members of this party – over 140 thousand votes); Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz (chairman of Polish People's Party); Paweł Kukiz (chairman of Kukiz'15); Jakub Kulesza (chairman of the parliamentary club – Confederation); Janusz Korwin-Mikke (chairman of KORWiN); Grzegorz Braun (chairman of Confederation of the Polish Crown); Robert Winnicki (chairman of National Movement).

Two methods were used in the research process. Quantitative analysis made it possible to determine parameters of the speeches (their number, frequency, etc.). Qualitative analysis, on the other hand, facilitated gaining insight into the subject matter of the speeches (content, positions and declarations). Ultimately, such an approach helped the researchers to process the collected data, compare them and make inferences. The research material was accessed via the official website of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, where stenographic records of all sittings are available.

The analysis provides an opportunity to learn about the frequency and content of parliamentary speeches of Poland's most important politicians. It will contribute to determining distinctions between leaders and their parties, as well as getting to know the arguments used. The undertaken analysis is also valuable because it documents the words of political leaders in the face of one of the major crises in recent years.

The study is comprised of five parts. After outlining the general framework of the reasoning in the introduction and the formal conditions parliamentary speeches must meet, results of quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented, followed by conclusions.

2. Formal conditions to be met by parliamentary speeches

The speech of a Member of Parliament (MP) is an institutionalised and formalised form of address. The circumstances of its delivery, the number of speeches and the time limit they have to follow are all specified. Focusing on the formal aspects of speeches delivered in the Sejm, it is necessary to point to three main legal acts that regulate this issue. These are: the Constitution (1997), the Act on the Exercise of the Mandate of a Deputy or Senator (1996), and the Standing Orders of the Sejm (1992). It is the latter document that contains the most detailed information as it precisely determines particular solutions and procedures in line with which MPs deliver their speeches.

The most important piece of legislation, that is the Constitution, provides only one article which relates to the problem addressed in the study. It says that the prime minister and other members of the government are obliged to respond to MPs' questions on current affairs at each sitting of the Sejm. This issue is clarified in the Standing Orders of the Sejm, which describe in detail the procedure for asking questions on current affairs, a matter to be explained below.

A second piece of legislation that relates to MPs' speeches is the Act on the Exercise of the Mandate of a Deputy or Senator. It indicates that an MP has the right to express their position on a given issue and participate in a discussion on matters considered during sittings of the Sejm. Also, under the same Act, as part of their mandate, MPs have the right to obtain information and explanations from members of the government and other bodies.

The most useful and precise legal act regulating MPs' speeches is the Standing Orders of the Sejm. The document differentiates between written and oral activity, the former of which is the centre of attention in the current study.

It is a key preliminary assumption that MPs do not enjoy complete freedom when delivering their speeches and must follow established procedures. The framework for this type of activity during parliamentary sittings is given in the Standing Orders the Sejm,

which clearly outline different modes of speaking. It should be pointed out that utterances of MPs during a sitting of the Sejm entail procedural consequences, as “motions and comments made by MPs during a sitting of the Sejm are subject to careful consideration by the relevant state bodies, institutions and organisations.” The course of the proceedings, including MPs’ speeches analysed below, is recorded. Minutes of the proceedings and a stenographic report are a full record of the proceedings. It is this document that provides the basis for the currently undertaken analysis and makes it possible to get acquainted with MPs’ utterances as it is available to the public on the Sejm website.

Individual MPs’ speeches are to follow a set time limit when addressing an item on the agenda, and may not exceed 15 minutes. In turn, speeches of MPs in discussion may not be longer than 10 minutes (with the exception of club speeches, which may not exceed 20 minutes). The number of speeches is also restricted; an MP may only speak twice in a debate on a given issue, and their second speech may last no longer than 5 minutes. In the above cases, following a procedure, the Speaker of the Sejm may set a different time limit or grant the floor yet another time. The order of appearance at the Sejm rostrum is also subject to regulations. MPs who intend to participate in a discussion of a particular item on the agenda shall sign a list of speakers run by the Secretary of the Sejm. The order may be changed by a decision of the Praesidium of the Sejm, which, having heard the opinion of the Council of Seniors, may decide on a different order than initially planned.

MPs also take the floor during a debate, with time limits applying to clubs, parliamentary circles and non-affiliated MPs. In the course of a debate, a club or circle has some time allocated and decides on the number of representatives who will speak on its behalf.

Among all parliamentary speeches, an MP’s statement seems to be of significance. It may be made at the end of each day’s sitting and may not last longer than 5 minutes. No discussion follows such a statement and it is a convenient formula for MPs to present their individual positions. It is ideal for the presentation of ideological beliefs and observations on current political events.

In addition, an MP may speak out of order on the agenda or in connection with an ongoing discussion only to make a formal motion or a correction of a previous utterance. MPs also have other formal opportunities to speak, including: requests for current information and questions on current affairs, both of which are addressed to members of the government.

It should be noted that taking the floor to request current information is related to representation MPs. A club or a group of at least 15 MPs has the right to request that a member of the government present some information. This procedure is most precisely described, both in terms of time limits (the total may not exceed 90 minutes) as well as order of taking the floor. First, an MP justifies their request, which may not exceed 5 minutes and which is followed by a reply of no more than 10 minutes. Then a discussion is held in which no MP may speak for more than 2 minutes, with the participants taking turns. At the end, the floor is again taken by the representative of the club or group making the request, for a maximum of 5 minutes, and the representative of the government, who has 10 minutes at their disposal.

Questions on current affairs also fall into the category of oral utterances and may be asked during a sitting of the Sejm. Significantly, they require a direct answer, although an attempt to ask such a question requires a written message addressed to the Speaker of the

Sejm on the subject of the question and the addressee. Moreover, it must be submitted by 9 p.m. on the day preceding the sitting during which it is supposed to be asked. Questions are answered by the ministers to whom they are addressed, or in exceptional cases by persons they authorise to do so. Again, the time limit is set, with 2 minutes for the person asking and 6 minutes for the addressee.

However, no more than 11 questions may be asked in this part of the sitting, and the order of questions is determined by the Praesidium of the Sejm. No discussion is to take place after the question and the answer. However, the person asking may put forward a supplementary question, but this may not exceed 1 minute, and the answer may not exceed 3 minutes.

The above determinants of parliamentary discourse, based on the Standing Orders of the Sejm, indicate that there are fairly precise requirements to be met by parliamentary speeches. They also show that this discourse has a clear framework of conduct, including time limits allocated to each speaker.

3. Quantitative analysis

Quantitative analysis was the first stage of the study, its main assumptions being getting to know particular numbers describing the analysed research material (e.g. the number of speeches, frequency of taking the floor, length of speeches, etc.), processing and comparing the obtained values. Quantitative research makes it possible, among other goals, to determine when and with what intensity the leaders in question participated in discussions concerning the fight against coronavirus and the consequences of the unfolding pandemic in Poland.

On the basis of stenographic reports of the chosen parliamentary sittings, the research material was compiled to contain basic data. The following table (Table 1) and graphs (Graph 1) present the results of this stage of research. The key indicators include: total number of speeches (TNS) – this is the sum of all speeches that were delivered during the sittings of the Sejm; number of speeches by a leader (NSL) – this is the number of speeches that were delivered by a given leader during the analysed sittings of the Sejm; number of speeches by a leader on the coronavirus pandemic (NSLC) – this is the number of speeches that out of all speeches delivered by a given leader referred to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic in Poland and worldwide.

This index included not only speeches that addressed in their subject matter the coronavirus pandemic, but also any consequences caused by its development, e.g. economic solutions, organisation of social life under restrictions, etc. The process of classifying a given speech was based on: reading the content of the speech, finding information on the analysed topic, assigning the speech to this category. During this stage of work, no software was used to analyse the material automatically and classify it according to constructed algorithms. Thus, the risk of inappropriate data processing by the electronic system was avoided.

In order to know the level at which the analysed leaders were involved in parliamentary discourse during the scope of time undergoing research, it was necessary to use the following mathematical formula:

$$\%_1 = \frac{NSL}{TNS} \times 100$$

The results were presented on a scale of 1–100, rounded to two decimal places.

To measure what percentage of the total number of speeches were those in which leaders spoke about issues related to the coronavirus pandemic, the following mathematical formula was used:

$$\%_2 = \frac{NSLC}{TNS} \times 100$$

The results were presented on a scale of 1–100, rounded to two decimal places.

In order to determine the extent to which issues related to the coronavirus pandemic dominated the speeches of the analysed party leaders, it was necessary to determine the relationship between the NSLC and NSL indices. The formula used for this was as follows:

$$\%_3 = \frac{NSLC}{NSL}$$

The results were presented on a scale of 0–1 (0 – speeches did not relate to the analysed issues; 1 – all speeches by a given leader were related to the analysed issues), rounded to two decimal places.

The procedure of classifying individual speeches on the basis of the constructed variables encompassed the following steps: collecting and chronologically arranging all speeches of each selected leader during the analysed period; reading the content of all the collected speeches; highlighting fragments of speeches that concerned the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences (e.g. the state of the health service, the economic crisis); classifying speeches in which such fragments were found according to a specific system (TNS, NSL, NSLC).

Out of a total of 4060 speeches delivered during the sittings of the Sejm selected for the purpose of the study, 504 were delivered by political leaders. The total value of the $\%_1$ index is 12.41, which corresponds to the participation of party leaders in parliamentary discourse during the studied period expressed as percentage. It can, therefore, be concluded that every twelfth speech in the Sejm was delivered by the politicians in question.

Out of 504 speeches, 119 included topics related to the coronavirus pandemic in Poland and its consequences. The overall value of the $\%_3$ index was 0.24. This shows that, on average, one in four speeches of a leader concerned the analysed topic. The data in Figure 3 indicate that the $\%_1$ and $\%_2$ curves are approximately parallel to each other. The level of interest in the topic under scrutiny remained constant in relation to the number of speeches delivered by a given leader at a particular sitting of the Sejm.

Leaders spoke relatively most frequently during the 8th ($\%_1 = 37.5$; $\%_2 = 26.56$) and 9th ($\%_1 = 32.91$; $\%_2 = 18.99$) Sejm sessions. Based on the quoted results, it can be seen that every 4–5 speeches of the leader concerned the analysed topic. The 13th ($\%_1 = 9.09$), 14th ($\%_1 = 8.13$), 15th ($\%_1 = 7.64$), and 18th ($\%_1 = 7.03$) Sejm sessions were characterised by the lowest level of leaders' involvement in parliamentary discourse.

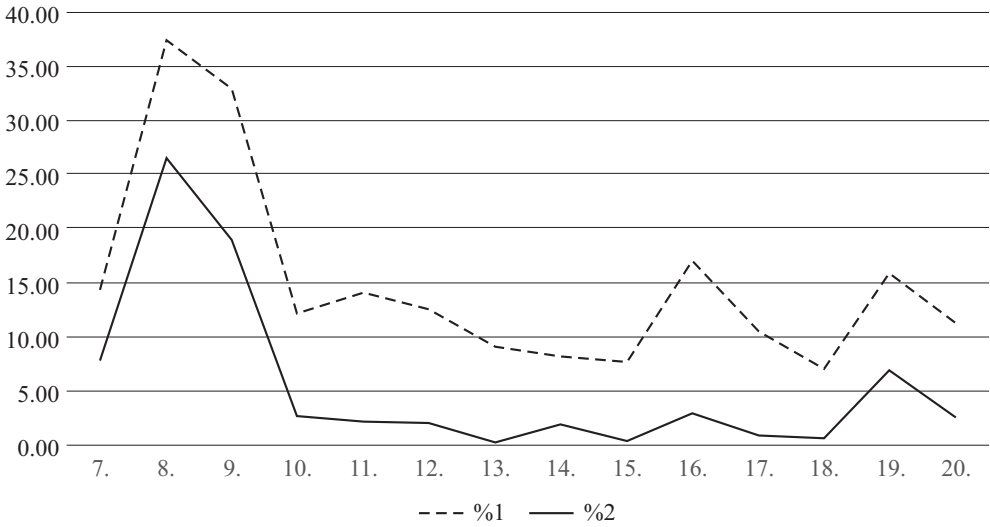
In terms of the number of delivered speeches, Grzegorz Braun was the most active of the analysed leaders, as he made a total of 145 speeches at the Sejm rostrum during the

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
		NSL	0	1	0	1	11	1	3	3	0	0	2	17	4	4	3	38	4	4		92	5,11
		NSLC	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	3	1	0	1	8	0	0	657	14	0,78
	11.	% ₁	0	0,15	0	0,15	1,67	0,15	0,46	0,46	0	0	0,30	2,59	0,61	0	0,46	5,78	0,61	0,61		14	0,78
		% ₂	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,15	0	0	0	0	0,46	0,15	0	0,15	1,22	0	0		2,13	0,12
		% ₃	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,33	0	0	0	0	0,18	0,25	0	0,33	0,21	0	0		0,15	0,07
		NSL	0	0	0	0	4	2	6	4	0	2	9	5	3	0	5	20	4	6		70	3,89
		NSLC	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	4	2	0		11	0,61
	12.	% ₁	0	0	0	0	0,71	0,36	1,07	0,71	0	0,36	1,60	0,89	0,53	0	0,89	3,57	0,71	1,07	561	12,48	0,69
		% ₂	0	0	0	0	0	0,18	0,18	0	0	0	0,18	0	0,18	0	0,18	0,71	0,36	0		1,96	0,11
		% ₃	0	0	0	0	0	0,50	0,17	0	0	0	0,11	0	0,33	0	0,20	0,20	0,50	0		0,16	0,11
		NSL	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	6	2	2		14	0,78
		NSLC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0		2	0,11
	13.	% ₁	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1,30	0	0	1,30	3,90	1,30	1,30	154	9,09	0,51
		% ₂	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,65	0	0	0	0	0,65	0		1,30	0,07
		% ₃	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,50	0	0	0	0	0,50	0		0,14	0,06
		NSL	0	1	0	0	3	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	8	5	2		23	1,28
		NSLC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	1		5	0,28
	14.	% ₁	0	0,35	0	0	1,06	0	0,35	0,35	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,71	2,83	1,77	0,71	283	8,13	0,45
		% ₂	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,35	1,06	0	0,35		1,77	0,10
		% ₃	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,5	0,38	0	0,50		0,22	0,08
		NSL	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	3	0	0	4	5	2	0	8	13	6	0	44	44	2,44
		NSLC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0		2	0,11
	15.	% ₁	0	0,17	0	0,17	0,17	0	0,52	0	0	0	0,69	0,87	0,35	0	1,39	2,26	1,04	0	576	7,64	0,42
		% ₂	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,17	0,17	0	0		0,35	0,02
		% ₃	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,13	0,08	0	0		0,05	0,01
		NSL	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	13	0	0		18	1
		NSLC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0		3	0,17
	16.	% ₁	0	0	0	0	0	0,94	0,94	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2,83	12,26	0	0	106	16,98	0,94
		% ₂	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		2,83	0,16
		% ₃	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,23	0	0		0,17	0,01

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	
17.	NSL	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	0	2	0	1	1	5	2	0	6	23	7	6		56	3,11	
	NSLC	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	4	0,22	
	% ₁	0	0	0	0	0	0,19	0,37	0	0,37	0	0,19	0,19	0,93	0,37	0	1,11	4,27	1,30	1,11	539	10,39	0,58	
18.	% ₂	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,19	0	0	0	0,19	0	0	0	0	0	0,19	0	0,19		0,74	0,04	
	% ₃	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,50	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0,04	0	0,17		0,07	0,10	
	NSL	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	1	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	1	1	0	1		13	0,72	
19.	NSLC	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0		1	0,06	
	% ₁	0	0	0	0	0	2,70	0,54	0	0,54	0	0	0,54	1,62	0	0	0,54	0,54	0	0,54	185	7,03	0,39	
	% ₂	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,54	0	0	0	0	0	0		0,54	0,03	
20.	% ₃	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0,33	0	0	0	0	0	0		0,08	0,02	
	NSL	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	2	1	3	1	0	4	2	0	2	0	4	0		23	1,28	
	NSLC	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	2	0	1	0	1	0		10	0,56	
Sum	% ₁	0	0	0	0	0	2,07	0,69	1,38	0,69	2,07	0,69	0	2,76	1,38	0	1,38	0	2,76	0	145	15,86	0,88	
	% ₂	0	0	0	0	0	0,69	0,69	0,69	0,69	0,69	0	0	0,69	1,38	0	0,69	0	0,69	0		6,90	0,38	
	% ₃	0	0	0	0	0	0,33	1	0,50	1	0,33	0	0	0,25	1	0	0,50	0	0,25	0		0,43	0,29	
Average	NSL	2	1	0	0	0	2	4	3	2	6	0	0	3	3	0	4	0	5	5		40	2,22	
	NSLC	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	3	0	0	0	1	0		9	0,5	
	% ₁	0,56	0,28	0	0	0	0,56	1,12	0,84	0,56	1,68	0	0	0,84	0,84	0	1,12	0	1,40	1,40	358	11,17	0,62	
20.	% ₂	0	0,28	0	0	0	0,28	0,28	0,28	0	0	0	0	0,28	0,84	0	0	0	0,28	0		2,51	0,14	
	% ₃	0	1	0	0	0	0,50	0,25	0,33	0	0	0	0	0,33	1	0	0	0	0,20	0		0,23	0,20	
	NSL	3	4	0	0	0	7	55	16	26	15	9	4	17	53	34	0	44	145	42	30		504	28
Sum	NSLC	0	1	0	0	0	1	24	4	7	2	1	1	12	19	0	10	25	6	5		119	6,61	
	% ₁	0,07	0,10	0	0	0	0,17	1,35	0,39	0,64	0,37	0,22	0,10	0,42	1,31	0,84	0	1,08	3,57	1,03	4060	12,41	0,69	
	% ₂	0	0,02	0	0	0	0,02	0,59	0,10	0,17	0,05	0,02	0,02	0,02	0,30	0,47	0	0,25	0,62	0,15		2,93	0,16	
Average	% ₃	0	0,25	0	0	0	0,14	0,44	0,25	0,27	0,13	0,11	0,25	0,06	0,23	0,56	0	0,23	0,17	0,14		0,24	0,19	
	NSL	0,21	0,29	0	0	0	0,50	3,93	1,14	1,86	1,07	0,64	0,29	1,21	3,79	2,43	0	3,14	10,36	3,00	2,5		36	2
	NSLC	0	0,07	0	0	0	0,07	1,71	0,29	0,50	0,14	0,07	0,07	0,07	0,86	1,36	0	0,71	1,79	0,43	290	8,50	0,47	
Average	% ₁	0,09	0,07	0	0	0	0,31	2,34	0,45	0,87	0,31	0,27	0,09	0,24	1,57	1,54	0	1,34	3,64	1,14	290	12,41	0,83	
	% ₂	0	0,02	0	0	0	0,11	1,36	0,10	0,34	0,09	0,05	0,01	0,01	0,54	1,16	0	0,45	0,77	0,23		2,93	0,31	
	% ₃	0	0,07	0	0	0	0,07	0,23	0,16	0,27	0,14	0,02	0,07	0,01	0,26	0,43	0	0,30	0,21	0,13		0,24	0,14	

Source: Own elaboration based on reports and transcripts from parliamentary works, <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/stenogramy.xsp>.

Figure 1. Comparison of values %₁ and %₂



Source: Own elaboration based on reports and transcripts from parliamentary works, <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/stenogramy.xsp>.

period under scrutiny (this is more than 28.7% of speeches made by all the leaders). The total value of the %₁ index is 3.57, the highest score among the scrutinised politicians. In contrast, Jarosław Gowin and Paweł Kukiz did not speak on the topic in question even once. Interestingly, the leaders of the parties that belong to the so-called United Right (Kaczyński, Gowin, Zbigniew Ziobro, Ryszard Terlecki) very rarely took the floor as compared to the leaders of the opposition parties, as they spoke only 14 times altogether.

Braun (NSLC = 25) and Borys Budka (NSLC = 24) spoke about the pandemic most frequently among all the leaders. Such results depend, among other aspects, on a generally high number of speeches made by these politicians. A more adequate indicator of the extent to which a given politician's speeches in the Sejm were dominated by the topic of the pandemic is the %₃ index. In this case, the highest value belongs to Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz (%₃ = 0.56), and it shows that in more than half of his parliamentary speeches he mentioned the analysed topic. The second result belongs to Budka (%₃ = 0.44). Interestingly, this index shows that Braun, who made the highest number of speeches among the analysed group, rarely spoke about the pandemic and issues related thereto in comparison with the total number of his speeches (%₃ = 0.17). Politicians who did not even once directly address the subject under scrutiny in their speeches were Kaczyński, Gowin and Kukiz.

During the analysed period, the pandemic and its implications were among topics most frequently addressed by political leaders during their parliamentary speeches. The conclusions offered above show that both the level of involvement in parliamentary discourse and the level of interest in the topic of the pandemic are significantly different among the politicians analysed in the study. It is an interesting trend that the activity in parliamentary discourse of the opposition parties leaders is significantly higher as compared to those of the majority ruling coalition, a trend that inspires deeper analysis in this field.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	PO	Tomczyk	-	19.	-	-	-	-	-	-	19.	-
	SLD	Czarzasty	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	17.	-
	Together	Zandberg	-	-	-	-	12.	-	-	12.	12.	-
	Spring	Gawkowski	-	8., 9., 10., 13., 18., 19.	13., 18.,	-	8., 11.	8., 9.	-	8., 9., 10.	11., 19., 20.	9., 10.
	PSL	Kosiniak- -Kamysz	9.	7., 8., 9., 12.	7., 8., 9., 20.	7., 8., 9., 19.	7., 8., 9.	8., 9., 12.,	-	8., 9.,	8., 11., 12., 19., 20.	-
	Kukiz'15	Kukiz	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	KORWiN	Korwin- -Mikke	-	8., 11.	-	-	9.	-	9.	-	7., 9., 15.	15.
	KKP	Braun	11.	9., 12.	11., 12.	-	9., 11.,	11., 14.	-	-	7., 9., 11., 12., 14., 16., 17.	-
	RN	Winnicki	13.	7.	19., 20.	-	13., 19.	-	-	-	12., 20.	-
	KORWiN	Kulesza	8.	9.			8., 9., 14., 17.	8.			9., 14., 17.	

Source: Own elaboration based on reports and transcripts from parliamentary works, <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/stenogramy.xsp>.

The above results indicate that the leaders in question discussed pandemic-related issues in different contexts, ranging from a diagnosis of the epidemiological situation, to the condition of the health care system and the economy, to the assessment of the government's actions in the face of the crisis.

The governing party's leaders referred to pandemic topics rather superficially. The opposition parties' leaders were most likely to assess the government's activities, as

well as discussing the current situation in the health care system and the economy. The politicians who raised the greatest number of aspects related to the pandemic and its consequences are Budka, Krzysztof Gawkowski, Kosiniak-Kamysz, and Braun. The topics distinguished in the Table 3 were present in parliamentary discourse throughout the entire period under scrutiny. No clear changes in topic-related trends were observed, that is no new issues appeared in the analysed period. There were also no clear topic-related trends among leaders from particular parliamentary clubs or parliamentary circles that would distinguish them from other leaders. It is impossible to point out which party placed more emphasis on a particular issue, disregarding other matters.

The next stage of qualitative research was comparing the positions and declarations of the analysed leaders when it comes to the topic under scrutiny, which was instrumental in determining what approach to the crisis the selected politicians had, what they thought of the activities of the government, what solutions they proposed to fight the pandemic.

Table 3

Analysis of declarations of political leaders regarding the pandemic

Parliamentary club	Party	Leader	Declarations, proposed solutions
1	2	3	4
Law and Justice	PiS	Kaczyński	-
	SP	Ziobro	-
	Agreement	Gowin	-
	PiS	Terlecki	-
Civic Coalition	PO	Budka	Exemption of entrepreneurs from social security contributions; Quick VAT refund; PLN 20 billion to support the health service; Extension of social security benefits; Declaration of a state of natural disaster; PLN 40,000 non-refundable loan for entrepreneurs; postponement of the presidential election; Criticism of the government
	Modern	Szlapka	Criticism of the government
	IP	No-wacka	COVID-19 tests for doctors every week; Vote of no confidence in the Minister of Health; Wage supplements for all health professionals; Criticism of the government
	Green	Tracz	Criticism of the government
	PO	Tomczyk	Criticism of the government

1	2	3	4
Left	SLD	Czarzasty	Criticism of the government
	Together	Zandberg	Opposition to wage cuts; Criticism of the government
	Spring	Gawkowski	Suspension of loan installments for a minimum of 6 months; Suspension of ZUS payments for entrepreneurs; Covering the costs of gas, electricity and rent bills by the state; Opposition to lowering salaries, extending working hours, restrictions on civil rights and freedoms, restrictions on the activities of non-governmental organizations; Declaration of a state of natural disaster; PLN 2,600 for anyone who lost their job or closed their company; Increasing the unemployment benefit to PLN 1,800; Criticism of the government
PSL-Kukiz'15	PSL	Kosiniak-Kamysz	Exemption of entrepreneurs from health insurance contributions; Exemption from income taxes; Quick VAT refund; Interest-free loans from a state bank; Support for local governments; Farmer's Allowance; Extension of social security benefits; Minimum wages for employees; Coronavirus tests for cancer patients and healthcare professionals; postponement of the presidential election; Criticism of the government
	Kukiz'15	Kukiz	-
Confederation	KORWIN	Korwin-Mikke	Removal of restrictions on the functioning of social and economic life; Liquidation of the so-called Anti-Crisis Shield; Criticism of the government
	KKP	Braun	Removal of restrictions on the functioning of social and economic life; Challenging the existence of the coronavirus pandemic; Criticism of the government
	RN	Winnicki	Systemic protection of seniors and the sick; Healthcare support; Withdrawal of restrictions on the functioning of social and economic life; Criticism of the government
	KORWIN	Kulesza	Removal of restrictions on the functioning of social and economic life; Criticism of the government

Source: Own elaboration based on reports and transcripts from parliamentary works, <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/stenogramy.xsp>.

Results of qualitative research on the positions and programme proposals of political leaders contained in their parliamentary speeches made it possible to draw the following conclusion: leaders of the ruling coalition presented no programme proposals, positions or declarations.

All leaders of the opposition parties criticised the government's actions taken during the crisis. Each of the politicians whose statements were analysed openly condemned solutions proposed by the government. The criticism concerned a number of issues, including economic solutions, health care and restrictions imposed on the life of Polish citizens.

Some leaders, apart from criticising the government's work, did not explicitly voice their propositions (Adam Szłapka, Małgorzata Tracz, Cezary Tomczyk, Włodzimierz Czarzasty); others presented lists of projects that, in their view, would protect the citizens against the crisis (Budka, Kosiniak-Kamysz, Gawkowski).

The leaders of the Confederation openly criticised the government for its actions in the fight against the pandemic, and demanded lifting all the restrictions to come back to socio-economic activity from before the pandemic as the only and best form of counteracting the crisis. Moreover, Braun repeatedly questioned the existence of the pandemic.

5. Conclusions

The undertaken analysis made it possible to carefully scrutinise speeches made by political leaders in the Sejm from a quantitative and qualitative point of view. First of all, it can be concluded that political leaders did not speak very often about the pandemic in the Sejm. Considering the scale of the pandemic and its impact on the functioning of the state, the research showed that speeches on this topic did not dominate parliamentary discourse in the analysed period. On average, one in four speeches by a given leader concerned the topic under scrutiny.

It was Braun and Budka who spoke on the pandemic the greatest number of times. However, it was Kosiniak-Kamysz who devoted half of his speeches to this problem, while in Budka's case it was nearly half. The other leaders, especially those representing the government coalition, spoke on the topic much less frequently.

Qualitative analysis pointed to clear differences between particular parties present in the Polish Sejm. The opposition leaders' speeches were obviously focused on criticising the government. At the same time, the criticism assumed different forms. Some leaders proposed solutions to support various social groups. The leaders of the Confederation were an exception here as they put more emphasis on the issue of lifting restrictions.

The undertaken analysis also revealed that the issue in question, while being the most important issue for Poles for many months, did not receive as much attention in the Sejm. This may indicate that political leaders do not treat parliamentary debates as seriously as they approach their speeches in the media. Their involvement in parliamentary discourse was clearly low. It was thus shown that making speeches on the pandemic in the Sejm was not a priority for them.

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Przywódcy polityczni wobec pandemii COVID-19. Analiza dyskursu w Sejmie

Streszczenie

Słowa przywódców politycznych w debacie parlamentarnej, zwłaszcza w sytuacjach kryzysowych, mają szczególne znaczenie. Celem opracowania jest analiza stanowisk i deklaracji przywódców politycznych wobec pandemii COVID-19 w Polsce na przykładzie wystąpień w Sejmie. Analizie ilościowej i jakościowej poddano 504 wystąpienia przewodniczących partii oraz klubów i kół poselskich. Analiza ukazała, że problematyka będąc przez wiele miesięcy najważniejszą kwestią dla Polaków, nie cieszyła się równie wielką uwagą przywódców politycznych w Sejmie. Przywódcy ugrupowań opozycyjnych byli aktywni w krytykowaniu rządu oraz wysuwaniu propozycji działań. Z kolei przywódcy partii rządowych nie brali aktywnego udziału w debacie.

Słowa kluczowe: przywódcy polityczni, przemówienia parlamentarne, dyskurs polityczny, COVID-19