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## **Aleksander Bocheński and his political realism: an outline**

Many historians have problems defining the concept of “political realism” when studying individuals or political organisations which could be reasonably presumed to be representatives of this trend of reflection on politics. This is mainly due to the emotional “load” of the concept itself and its not entirely positive connotations, and in Poland due to the additional burden of historical experience, which led to political realists being labelled as “collaborators” or even “traitors.”<sup>1</sup>

If we assume that individuals aspiring to political realism in Poland became involved in the dispute described by Adam Bromke as a confrontation between idealism and realism in Polish politics,<sup>2</sup> Aleksander Bocheński was certainly one of them. As a political commentator, he became permanent part of the history of Polish realistic thought thanks to his book entitled *Dzieje głupoty w Polsce* [A History of Idiocy in Poland]. Nevertheless, he was also the author of several thousand shorter publications, from books to small press releases. In addition, he tried to exert influence on the current public

1. As noted by J. Kloczkowski (*Oblicza polskiego realizmu politycznego*, in: *Realizm polityczny. Przypadek Polski. Wybór tekstów*, red. J. Kloczkowski, Kraków 2008, pp. 7–15), as manifested e.g. by the stylistically masterful *Niemcewicz od przodu i tyłu* by Karol Zbyszewski (Warszawa 1939).
2. A. Bromke, *Trwale nurty w polityce polskiej*, “Tematy” 1969 nr 31–32, p. 2; A. Bromke, *Poland's politics. Idealism vs Realism*, Cambridge 1967; *Słoń a sprawy świata. Rozmowa profesorów: Adama Bromke i Wojciecha Sokolewicza*, “Tu i Teraz” 1983 nr 26, pp. 1, 14.

life by his involvement with various political circles, both formal and informal. This article presents the life and work of Aleksander Bocheński, attempting to determine whether he actually was a political realist. Due to its multiple aspects, the study is of contributory character, being an encouragement and introduction to a wider discussion of the subject.

## 1. Political realism: definitional challenges

Any discussion on the presence of political realism in Bocheński's thought should start from a brief look at some suggested definitions to propose a synthetic perspective on the concept.

We may agree with a thesis formulated by Piotr Koryś, who argued that political realism, derived from the theory of international relations, refers to political reality in general, and Bożena Bankowicz, who accentuates particularly rational analysis as a key factor in this approach to politics.<sup>3</sup> Among short definitions supplied by foreign researchers, the one proposed by Roger Scruton seems optimal; Scruton noticed that realists, striving to reach their political goals in the interest of the community, rely on the analysis of reality as it is.<sup>4</sup>

On the basis of findings by researchers such as Adam Wielomski, Arkady Rzegocki, Włodzimierz Bolecki or Paweł Skibiński, a conclusion may be drawn on the fundamental impact of the disputes on the role of idealism and pragmatism in politics on the definition of political realism. This led not only to the pejorative notion of "Machiavellianism" and realism being understood as something which aspires to ethical perfection (in an attempt to synthesize idealism and realism) but also to allegations that realists claim exclusive right to judge someone as reasonable/foolish in the political aspect, frequently mistaking their rationalism for opportunism.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, Marek Kornat, who formulated a deeply significant thesis on realists' attempt

3. P. Koryś, *Realizm polityczny w myśli Narodowej Demokracji*, in: *Patriotyzm i zdrada. Granice realizmu i idealizmu w polityce i myśli polskiej*, red. J. Kloczkowski, M. Szudrzyński, Kraków 2008, p. 119–120; B. B. [B. Bankowicz], *Realizm*, in: *Słownik polityki*, red. M. Bankowicz, Warszawa 1996, p. 231.

4. R. Scruton, *Słownik myśli politycznej*, Poznań 2002, p. 334.

5. A. Wielomski, *Realizm polityczny*, in: J. Bartyzel, B. Szlachta, A. Wielomski, *Encyklopedia polityczna*, t. 1: *Myśl polityczna: główne pojęcia, doktryny i formy ustroju*, Radom 2007, pp. 348–351; A. Rzegocki, *Dwa oblicza polskiego realizmu politycznego*, in: *Patriotyzm i zdrada*, pp. 27–38; P. Skibiński, *Realizm polityczny a powstanie warszawskie. Analiza trzech aspektów: decyzji o wybuchu powstania, o jego kontynuacji i postawy społeczeństwa wobec niego*, in: *Patriotyzm i zdrada*, pp. 135–153;

to come to terms with the world's ethical imperfections while refusing to impose moral standards but also failing to accept the dominance of idealism, concluded that in Polish realities choosing the Romantic path, siding with "honour," was more realistic than "compromise" (our protagonist polemicized with a similar view on the matter).<sup>6</sup>

Ideas presented by Piotr Kimla and Hans Morgenthau appear to be the most valuable for the purpose of the present study. The former drew our attention on the realist's "sense of reality," which manifested itself not only in the departure from emotional approach to politics but also in a reflection on the consequences of political action.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, aware of frequently conflicting moral standards and political aims, Morgenthau connected the fact to the ethically imperfect human nature which determined the public domain. In their desire for power, human communities pursued rational foreign policy, and even if they spoke of universal morality, they rarely followed its principles.<sup>8</sup>

However, Kimla was well-aware of Morgenthau's pessimism, but equally of the idealism of his own proposals, and he managed to convincingly explain what political realism is and what is not. Specifically, realists do not passively accept the workings of reality, they do not worship brute force; as non-opportunists, they demand a cold-headed analysis of circumstances; as opponents of nihilism they are not ignorant of the existence of the immoral element. Consequently, respect for reality means the rejection of doctrinairism while tapping into historical knowledge. This does not involve determinism but rather confidence that there are certain recurring patterns in history. Sharing Morgenthau's view on the primacy of international relations, Kimla emphasised the importance that realists attached to *raison d'état*, which meant reasonable choice of allies and critical reflection on whether risks which would result in the loss of potential already held are really justified.

W. Bolecki, *Antykomunizm Józefa Mackiewicza – realizm czy idealizm?*, in: *Patriotyzm i zdrada*, pp. 177–192.

6. M. Kornat, *Problem realizmu w polskiej myśli politycznej na uchodźstwie po II wojnie światowej – pytania i tezy*, "Politeja" 2013 nr 25, pp. 114–119. A proposal similar to Kornat's conclusions: M. Łuczewski, *Ultramontańskie źródła ruchu ludowego. Studium realizmu politycznego*, in: *Patriotyzm i zdrada*, pp. 78–81.
7. P. Kimla, *Realizm z fałszywej analogii historycznej wywiedziony. Przypadek Ksawerego Pruszyńskiego*, "Politeja" 2013 nr 25, pp. 178–179.
8. H. J. Morgenthau, *Polityka między narodami. Walka o potęgę i pokój*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 20–33, 47–53, 135–173, 177–185, 205–211.

Perhaps the most interesting conclusion of Kimla's work was that realists were never conformists, since in formulating their aims they did not follow the voice of majority as the decisive factor.<sup>9</sup>

An interesting observation was made by Tomasz Sikorski and Adam Wątor, who argued that a political realist may (though does not have to be) a maximalist in formulating his or her aims, and should not disregard the emotions of the community.<sup>10</sup> Thus, a realist should be able to formulate realistic aims, means and methods, while setting a limit to compromise, thanks to which they do not act in contravention of their own idealistic framework, as concluded by Rafał Łatka in his analysis of Stefan Wyszyński's case.<sup>11</sup> A fundamental difference between realism and opportunism lies in that the former involves not only acting in favour of non-egoistic interests but also avoiding harming such interest on both conceptual and practical level. Being a method of doing politics rather than a political doctrine, realism is a broad trend which can accommodate politicians and thinkers who belong to various options. What they have in common is not infallibility or ability to make correct political predictions (both Piłsudski and Dmowski were realists during World War I, but there were not always correct in their assessment of the course of future events); instead, a characteristic which political realists share is the avoidance of dogmatism and wishful thinking. What use is realistic judgement if it ultimately leads us to a conclusion that "our sacrifice will shake the conscience of the world" and "the force of retaliation will serve us better than tanks"? Equally, what use is pessimistic yet realistic view on Poland's wretched situation if the politician who expresses it states that if *finis Poloniae* has come, the nation should cease to exist, and it should adapt

9. P. Kimla, *Historycy-politycy jako źródło realizmu politycznego. Tukidydes – Polibiusz – Machiavelli*, Kraków 2009, *passim*; P. Kimla, *Etyka w realizmie politycznym*, "Czasopismo Prawno-Historyczne" 2014 z. 2, pp. 303–314; P. Kimla, *Realistyczne krytyki moralizatorstwa w polityce*, in: *Moralność i władza jako kategorie myśli politycznej*, red. J. Justyński, A. Madeja, Warszawa 2011, pp. 13–22; P. Kimla, *Realizm polityczny a Polska*, in: *Między sercem a rozumem. Romantyzm i realizm w polskiej myśli politycznej*, red. A. Citkowska-Kimla, P. Kimla, E. Antipow, K. Konik, Kraków 2017, pp. 41–64.
10. T. Sikorski, A. Wątor, *Wstęp*, in: *Marzyciele i realiści. O roli tradycji w polskiej myśli politycznej od upadku powstania styczniowego do XXI wieku*, red. T. Sikorski, A. Wątor, Szczecin 2009, pp. 7–9.
11. R. Łatka, *Czy prymasa Wyszyńskiego można określić mianem realisty politycznego?*, "Politeja" 2013 nr 25, p. 209.

foreign language and culture? Does this mean that Aleksander Bocheński was a doctrinaire, a dreamer or a political realist?

## 2. "Imperialist" realism?

In the interwar period, Bocheński, after his journalistic debut in "Słowo Polskie"<sup>12</sup> and his first book *Tendencje samobójcze narodu polskiego* [The Polish Nation's Suicidal Tendencies], which he co-wrote with his brother Adolf (and which presented disregard of internal threats and restricting the influence of eminent politicians as reasons for Poland's demise),<sup>13</sup> began to sympathise with the nascent "imperialist" movement. The movement saw the need for "state imperialism," which should be implemented both in internal policy (by building a solid political system) and external policy: Poland should solve the dilemma of being situated between Germany and Russia through preventive aggression.<sup>14</sup>

The latter issue became a peculiar journalistic speciality of the middle brother from the Bocheński family, who wrote for "Bunt Młodych" and "Polityka," both published by Jerzy Giedroyc, and it is primarily this issue which is related to the eponymous question of political realism. The prospective author of *Dzieje głupoty w Polsce* attempted to prove in his interwar political writing that Poland could not survive as a state situated between German and Russian superpowers (a view also shared by Piłsudski, Dmowski, Studnicki, Cat-Mackiewicz or Adolf Bocheński). Therefore, taking for granted the belief that it is impossible to follow a policy which is at the same time anti-German and anti-Russian (i.e. anti-Soviet, since in Bocheński's eyes Bolshevism was yet another emanation of Russian imperialism), we should seek to ally with one of our powerful neighbours against the other one. The choice was dictated by "strategy rather than ideology." More specifically, we should ally ourselves with the stronger against the weaker and more dangerous one.<sup>15</sup>

12. A. Bocheński, *Na śmierć rotmistrza Bochenka*, "Słowo Polskie" 1923 nr 308, p. 5.
13. A. Bocheński, A. M. Bocheński, *Tendencje samobójcze narodu polskiego*, Lwów 1925.
14. R. Tomczyk, *Myśl Mocarstwowa. Z dziejów młodego pokolenia II Rzeczypospolitej*, Szczecin 2008; R. Tomczyk, *Akademicka Myśl Mocarstwowa przed "Buntem Młodych"*, "Przegląd Zachodniopomorski" 1997 z. 4, pp. 77–105.
15. A. Bocheński, *Śmiertelne niebezpieczeństwo żydowskie*, "Polityka" [hereinafter: P] 1937 nr 28, p. 2; A. Bocheński, *O imperialiźmie, o Skińskim i o sprawie żydowskiej*, P 1938 nr 9, p. 3; A. Bocheński, *Jeszcze o instynkcie narodowym i Panu J. E. Skińskim*, P 1938 nr 14, p. 6; A. Bocheński, *Zygakiem przez prasę*, "Bunt Młodych" [hereinafter: BM] 1935 nr 11, p. 5; A. Bocheński, *Szkoła nauk politycznych contra Bunt*

Bocheński considered the Soviet Union the worst enemy of the Second Republic of Poland. He argued that although Poland was in territorial conflict with Germany, the contention with the Soviets was of ideological nature, and that it precluded the existence of Poland as an independent country in the long run. In Bocheński's writings, USSR was an "imperialist tsardom of Great Russia," notorious for its cruelty and completely justifying the claim that "communism is not a belief — it is a crime." Its destruction was indispensable to Poland's *raison d'état* and constituted a fundamental aim of "imperialists."<sup>16</sup>

However, this was possible only if several conditions were met. The first one was the mobilisation of the Polish society, which, diplomatically speaking, was not excited at the idea. Petty ambitions, conflicts between political parties, putting faith in the West — all of them were Polish distractions from a realistic approach to foreign policy. Consequently, it was difficult to expect that they would be able to understand the necessity of enlisting help of a real but imperfect ally in a preventive war against the Soviets, and that only Germans could serve as such ally, especially if ruled by the Nazis. Bocheński seemed to be aware that this would require making territorial concessions, but also knew that making this intention clear would compromise his ideas, so he confined himself to generalisations and vague suggestions.<sup>17</sup>

If Poland wanted to be realistic about war with the Soviets, it should also seek support from nations enslaved by Bolshevism, i.e. Belarusians, and more importantly, Ukrainians. The journalist was aware that the belief that the very presence of Polish soldiers beyond Zbruch river would cause an anti-Soviet uprising in Dnieper Ukraine was a pipe dream. The policy of Polish governments towards Ukrainian minority was paramount in this respect, and in those days it was a contradiction of the Jagiellonian, federalist and Promethean ideas. Bocheński asked how it was possible to enlist the

*Młodych*, BM 1935 nr 18, p. 6; A. Bocheński, *Podkreślenia i niedomówienia Ryszarda Pietrzyńskiego*, BM 1934 nr 7, p. 1. On Giedroyc's group see: M. Król, *Style politycznego myślenia. Wokół "Buntu Młodych" i "Polityki"*, Paris 1979, *passim*.

16. A. Bocheński, *Do pracy!*, "Głos Zachowawczy" 1926 nr 2, p. 3; *O imperializmie...*, p. 3; A. Bocheński, *Jeszcze o instynkcie...*, p. 6; A. Bocheński, *Młoda Polska postąpi jak młoda Japonja*, BM 1936 nr 11, p. 6; A. Bocheński, *Nie, nie jesteśmy w przyjaźni z Bolszewją*, BM 1933 nr 45, p. 1; A. Bocheński, *Oczyścić prasę*, BM 1936 nr 7, p. 8; A. Bocheński, *Instytut Naukowo-Badawczy Europy Wschodniej w Wilnie*, P 1939 nr 1, pp. 3, 8.
17. A. Bocheński, *Do wileńskiej młodzieży narodowej list otwarty*, "Słowo" [hereinafter: S] 1937 nr 229, p. 3; A. Bocheński, *Notatki polemiczne. Dziennik Wileński*, S 1937 nr 242, p. 3; A. Bocheński, *Hiszpania bohaterska*, P 1937 nr 27, p. 6.

cooperation of Ukrainians in the USSR if Poles kept persecuting their compatriots in East Galicia and Volhynia? It was one of the reasons why he was an ardent supporter of the assimilation of ethnic minorities by the state and a fervent opponent of the Polish government's policy towards minorities, especially towards Ukrainians. He found it incompatible with Poland's raison d'état, claimed that it intensified ethnic conflicts and increased the risk of rebellion in the borderlands, and that its effects were opposite from what Poland intended. According to Bocheński, because of the carelessness of the Polish administration, some conciliatory Ukrainian groups were considered traitors by their fellow countrymen. He discussed those issues in a number of articles with Stanisław Łoś and Włodzimierz Bączkowski in *Problem polsko-ukraiński w Ziemi Czerwieńskiej*.<sup>18</sup>

It should be also mentioned that Bocheński, who was close to the Vilnius circles of "Słowo," like the conservatists who favoured Germany, with the exception of Władysław Studnicki, re-defined his concepts in 1939. Already in early spring he criticised minister Beck for being unable to take advantage of Poland's good relations with Germany to secure more relevant benefits for his country. Warsaw did not object to successive annexations by Nazi Germany while failing to gain anything in return — wrote Bocheński. In the face of a crisis in relations with the Third Reich, Bocheński praised the efforts aimed at forming an alliance with West European countries, and on the eve of the outbreak of the war concentrated only on his call to armed resistance.<sup>19</sup>

18. A. Bocheński, S. Łoś, W. Bączkowski, *Problem polsko-ukraiński w Ziemi Czerwieńskiej*, Warszawa 1938, *passim*; [A. Bocheński] *Polityka mniejszościowa*, in: the editorial team of "Polityka" [A. M. Bocheński, A. Bocheński, S. Skwarczyński, K. Studentowicz], *Polska idea imperialna*, Warszawa 1938, pp. 33–38; A. Bocheński, "Problem Ukrainy." *Kilka uwag z powodu art. J. B. w „Naszej Przyszłości,”* S 1930 nr 120, p. 1; A. Bocheński, *O istotę sprawy ukraińskiej*, "Czas" 1930 nr 290, p. 1; A. Bocheński, *Wykorzystać nastroje mas ukraińskich*, BM 1935 nr 23–24, p. 1; A. Bocheński, *Sejm contra Szeptycki*, P 1938 nr 3, p. 2; A. Bocheński, *Jeszcze sprawa świętojurska*, P 1938 nr 5, pp. 5–6; A. Bocheński, *Biuletyn polsko-ukraiński*, P 1939 nr 3, p. 6; B. Kosiński, *Ruch konserwatywny: publicyści "Buntu Młodych" i "Polityki" wobec kwestii ukraińskiej*, in: *Sen o potęgę. Bezpieczeństwo. Suwerenność. Mocarstwo. Rzeczpospolita Polska 1918–1939*, red. E. Maj, J. Gryz, E. Kirwiel, E. Podgajna Lublin 2014, pp. 379–392; A. Orzełek, *Idea asymilacji państwowej Ukraińców w Małopolsce Wschodniej w międzywojennej refleksji politycznej Aleksandra Bocheńskiego*, "Rocznik Lubelski" 42 (2016), pp. 119–131.
19. A. Bocheński, *Zygazkiem przez prasę*, BM 1937 nr 4, p. 8; A. Bocheński, *Trzynaście lat czekaliśmy na Ciebie, Francjo*, BM 1935 nr 11, p. 2; A. Bocheński, *Zygazkiem przez prasę. Prasa polska po hańbie czeskiej*, P 1939 nr 6, p. 8; A. Bocheński, *Niech pomoc Anglii nie zmniejsza sił własnych*, S 1939 nr 90, p. 1; Al. B. [A. Bocheński], *Hitler mówi.*

His analysis of the situation in his interwar geopolitical reflection was certainly that of a political realist. Poland did not survive aftermath of the German-Soviet agreement. The definition of realism proposed above was also compatible with an idealistic aim, one of the pursuit of Poland's success. A means to this end, i.e. the disruption of one of its hostile neighbours, seemed very far-fetched, albeit it appears the only effective method of solving the Second Republic of Poland's geopolitical dilemma. Specific methods involved: an anti-Soviet coalition with Germans, and recruiting Ukrainians, seemed exceedingly difficult, perhaps impossible to Bocheński. Accordingly, his realism was lined with resignation: Bocheński was able to find an effective solution but saw little chance of its successful implementation. The alternative was war, which would ultimately end in disaster.

Did Bocheński think about long-term consequences when developing his concept of the anti-Soviet alliance with Germany? Did he envisage a Polish-German invasion of Bolshevik inland areas? His inter-war reflections on this matter are nebulous. However, their reception should not be distorted by the fact that he adamantly supported minister Beck's policy in 1939. To Bocheński, Hitler's demands were beyond the limits of compromise, and as such they had to be rejected; in his opinion, their acceptance would not have led to Poland becoming a great power. Warsaw could cooperate with Berlin on its own conditions only as an ally on an equal footing. Although after the war Bocheński wrote that in 1939 Poland had no other choice than to oppose the Reich even on its own, between the lines there was a suggestion that there was an off-chance of an alliance with the Reich and that such alliance should have been formed when the Reich was relatively weak.<sup>20</sup>

- Beck wyjeżdża*, S 1939 nr 92, p. 1; A. Bocheński, *Notatki polemiczne*, S 1939 nr 94, p. 3; A. Bocheński, *Na marginesie mowy Hitlera*, P 1939 nr 11, pp. 4–5; A. Bocheński, *Amocklauf*, P 1939 nr 15, p. 1. On the evolution of the outlook of the columnists for the Vilnius daily "Słowo," including Bocheński: J. Sadekiewicz, *"Ci, którzy przekażać nie umieją." Idea porozumienia polsko-niemieckiego w publicystyce Władysława Studnickiego i wileńskiego "Słowa" (do 1939)*, Kraków 2012, *passim*; J. Gzella, *Między Sowietami a Niemcami. Koncepcje polskiej polityki zagranicznej konserwatystów wileńskich zgrupowanych wokół "Słowa" (1922–1939)*, Toruń 2011, *passim*.
20. Archive of Modern Records [hereinafter: AAN], a collection of underground and insurgent press, ref. 96/1, "Biuletyn Polityczny Wawel" 1940 nr 6, sheet 1–7; A. Bocheński, *O dyskusji nad Monte Cassino*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" 1946 nr 45, p. 1; A. Bocheński, *Komentarze i wycinki*, "Kierunki" 1968 nr 4, p. 11; A. Bocheński, *Wędrówki po dziejach przemysłu polskiego*, cz. 3, Warszawa 1971, pp. 28–70, 72–73, 170, 217; A. Bocheński, *Rozmyślenia o polityce polskiej*, Warszawa 1987, p. 175; A. Bocheński, *Parę wspomnień o Adolffie Bocheńskim*, "Tygodnik Polski" 1984 nr 52/53, p. 14.



What consequences would it have had (if possible, which, as I emphasized, even Bocheński doubted)? The question belongs to the field of counterfactual history and giving a scientific response to it is impossible. We do know what consequences Poland's foreign policy in 1939 had. Faced with a threat of the country's defeat, political realists try to find ways to avert it without violating their principles, and minimise losses in the event of such defeat. If in the late 1930s Bocheński and his colleagues deserved to be called pessimistic realists, or even tragic realists, the "unconvincing" ones, after the war Bocheński must have concluded that any plans for Polish "imperialism" had to be shelved forever.

### 3. Realism and collaboration

In the campaign of 1939 Bocheński fought in the ranks of the 22nd Uhlan Regiment. After the regiment was dissolved, he returned to his home village Ponikwa and was arrested by NKVD, which arranged a peculiar public court, with the sound of gallows being assembled in the background. He was saved thanks to the local people who testified that the accused had behaved exceptionally well towards them. Accordingly, he was put in a prison in Brody, which he left in December 1939, presumably due to the intercession of Stepan Ołeksiuk, a Ukrainian communist activist (for whom Adolf Bocheński had once stood surety before a Polish court of justice) and the local Jewish community. Following his imprisonment, he left for his family manor near Kielce in General Government.<sup>21</sup> Maybe those events, aside from the awareness

21. Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance in Warsaw [hereinafter: AIPN], ref. IPN BU 0648/74/1, an interview on Aleksander Bocheński, sheet 116; A. Bocheński, *Materiały do kroniki rodzinnej Bocheńskich*, Fribourg 1981, p. 15; A. Bocheński, *Odpowiedź na kwestionariusz Stanisława Mackiewicza do biografii Adolfa Bocheńskiego (fragmenty)*, in: S. Cat-Mackiewicz, *Wunderkind. Rzecz o Adolffie Bocheńskim*, Kraków 2017, pp. 246, 279–280; R. Zadura, *Saga rodu Bocheńskich. O przodkach, rodzinie i młodości o. Józefa Marii Bocheńskiego*, Kraków 2013, pp. 9–10; K. Pastuszewski, *Aleksander Bocheński. Koryfeusz polskiej historii*, "Akant" 2001 nr 3, p. 7; W. Wendland, *Katon w "krainie wielkich błaznów."* *Aleksandra Bocheńskiego wizja polskości*, in: *Marzyciele i realiści*, p. 524; W. Sznarbachowski, *300 lat wspomnień*, Londyn 1997, p. 171; E. Moszyński, *Ludzie i czasy "Czasu."* *Z historii czołowej gazety i wybitnych konserwatystów Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Toruń 2004, p. 229–231; J. Durka, *Janusz Radziwiłł 1880–1967. Biografia polityczna*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 279–280, 293–295; M. Pruszyński, *W dziewięćdziesiątą rocznicę urodzin Aleksandra Bocheńskiego*, "Zeszyty Historyczne" 134 (2000), p. 170; TVP S.A. Documentation and Archive Repertoire Centre in Warsaw [hereinafter: ODiZP], ref.

of the failure of his previous political ideas, played a part in redefining his views on politics in Poland?

Bocheński became involved with conservative and aristocratic circles concentrated around the Central Civilians' Protection Office as early as 1940. In this group he was one of the most determined supporters of collaboration with Germans, even up to creating Germany-dependent administration and government, as mentioned by Jerzy Giedroyc and confirmed in a letter which Giedroyc received from Bocheński at that time. His idea, however, was not approved by Adam Ronikier and Janusz Radziwiłł. Bocheński thought this was exceptionally unfortunate for the Polish nation, and he still held this opinion towards the end of his life. In another account, Bocheński was also willing to support the concept of Polish autonomy in a potential Ukrainian satellite state subordinate to the Third Reich.<sup>22</sup> He also met Bolesław Piasecki, although at that point he did not subscribe to his political ideas. He was involved in the publication of an underground newsletter entitled "Biuletyn Polityczny" by the "Wawel" group, he loosened his ties with the latter when it became part of the National Confederation.<sup>23</sup> His pessimistic outlook on Polish affairs drove a wedge between Bocheński and the group (which became quickly dominated by Bolesław Piasecki). We may conclude

SK15136, *Rzeczpospolita druga i pół. Biały kruk – Aleksander Bocheński*, reż. J. Diałtowski, Poland 1994.

22. The Polish Underground Movement Study Trust [hereinafter: SPP], Unit of the 6<sup>th</sup> Staff of Commander-in-Chief [hereinafter: OVINW], ref. A.251, Appendix 1 to a report of Chief Commander of the Union of Armed Struggle General Stefan "Kalina" Rowecki to Commander-in-Chief General Władysław Sikorski on Ukraine, 15 November 1941, sheet 224. Archive of the Literary Institute in Paris, Aleksander Bocheński's letter, date on a Romanian postal stamp: 24 Aug 1940, Krakow [<http://static.kulturaparyska.com/attachments/dd/40/63ee439bb02dec72ce559dbc7ef82ee4730f9dd7.jpeg> (1.10.2017)]; J. Giedroyc, *Autobiografia na cztery ręce*, Warszawa 1999, p. 74; K. Rękas, *Sapere auso – wspomnienie o śp. Aleksandrze Bocheńskim (1904–2001)*, "Pro Fide Rege et Lege" 2001 nr 1, p. 2; ODiZP, ref. SK15136, *Rzeczpospolita druga...*
23. K. Malinowski, *Tajna Armia Polska, Znak, Konfederacja Zbrojna. Zarys genezy, organizacji i działalności*, Warszawa 1986, pp. 104–125; Archive of the Civitas Christiana Catholic Society in Warsaw [hereinafter: AKSCCh], files with regard to Aleksander Bocheński [hereinafter: ZAIB], ref. 1/12, "Moje spotkanie z Bolesławem Piaseckim – rozmowa z Aleksandrem Bocheńskim" [an interview with Aleksander Bocheński by Jan Engelgard], no page numbers. In London, "Wawel" was seen as a follow-up to the community centred around pre-war "Polityka," which was in a way a simplification due mostly due to Bocheński's presence. The Polish Institute and Sikorski Museum in London, the Cabinet of the Council of Ministers. Office files, ref. 85, "Raport sytuacyjny nr 1", sheet 205–206.

that at the time when Germans were overwhelmingly successful, Bocheński's willingness to cooperate with them was dictated by the lack of faith in the victory of the Allies and the conviction that the war would ultimately lead to a compromise (to the detriment of Poland), so an "emergency plan" had to be sought.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, Bocheński was aware that the Polish underground forces and society did not even contemplate a tacit ceasefire, much less any form of cooperation with Germans. He was terrified with his compatriots' ignorance of the devastating effect of the resistance movement on the loss of life among Poles; he was also indignant at the revival of Romantic and insurgent tendencies in his nation. Intending to "educate the nation differently," he started work on *Dzieje głupoty w Polsce*, a series of pamphlets on Polish historiography. In his work he blamed historians for making Poles believe that armed resistance was the only path to regaining independence.<sup>25</sup>

In his opinion, the Warsaw Uprising proved that it was not the case; he himself tried to minimize its tragic consequences by negotiating with German officers in Krakow, accompanied by Ronikier. Negotiations with the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) in Lviv in the period of the Polish-Ukrainian conflict in southeast borderlands were another example of his activity aimed at protecting Poland's demographic resources, for he claimed that it was back then that the Ukrainians offered to cease military operations against Poles in exchange for territorial concessions guaranteed by the Government Delegation for Poland.<sup>26</sup> In doing so, Bocheński was convinced that Poles could not rely on the Western countries' assistance, and that the only alternative

24. SPP, OVINW, ref. A.287, "Postawa polityczna społeczeństwa. Raport o sytuacji wewnętrznej za czas od 1. lutego do 31. marca 1941.", sheet 4–5; National Archive in Lublin [hereinafter: APL], Łoś Archive from Germany [hereinafter: AŁN], ref. 463, Aleksander Bocheński's letter, 20 October 1943, Ponikwa, sheet 10; Aleksander Bocheński's letter to Stanisław Łoś, 10 October 1943, Ponikwa, sheet 11; *O głupocie raz jeszcze. Rozmowa z Aleksandrem Bocheńskim*, "Sztandar Młodych" 1986 nr 90, p. 1.
25. APL, AŁN, ref. 463, Aleksander Bocheński's letter, 20 October 1943, Ponikwa, sheet 10; Aleksander Bocheński's letter to Stanisław Łoś, 10 October 1943, Ponikwa, sheet 11; *O głupocie raz jeszcze. Rozmowa z Aleksandrem Bocheńskim*, "Sztandar Młodych" 1986 nr 90, p. 1.
26. APL, AŁN, ref. 463, Aleksander Bocheński's letter, 20 October 1943, Ponikwa, sheet 10; ODiZP, ref. SK15136, *Rzeczpospolita druga...*; A. Ronikier, *Pamiętniki 1939–1945*, Kraków 2013, pp. 350; 354, 362–363, 375.

they were left with at the end of the war was to cooperate either with the Germans or the Soviets.<sup>27</sup>

It is difficult to blame Bocheński for his efforts to halt German or Ukrainian repressions. We may ask if the plans for limited collaboration with the Germans, even on administrative level, were realistic. He admitted that they met with no response not only from Polish leaders and society in general, but also among conservatists with whom he actively worked. Bocheński was convinced that Germans would agree to such cooperation if Poles really wanted it. What remained then for a person who held that the policy of both the Polish government in London and the Polish underground was harmful but to try to oppose it with his own limited means? Was it Romanticism? Rather a belief in his realist intangibles. A realist is not an opportunist, so he does not go with the flow of mindless compromise, yet neither does he side with mindless insurgency. In this particular case the key question is whether the collaboration with the Nazis as postulated by Bocheński would lead to the expected results in the short and long term. Again, from a scientific point of view, the answer to this question is impossible. We may only speculate whether the sacrifice of the soldiers of the Polish underground and civilians harassed by the invader's repressions brought tangible political benefits, and compare it with the fate of other nations of Central Europe, which accepted some form of cooperation with the Nazi Germany.

#### 4. Between history and politics: political realism in the early years of the People's Republic of Poland

At the same time, aware of the Red Army's victories and willing to mitigate demographic and cultural losses, Bocheński was contemplating a political compromise with the Soviets. He headed a group of Krakow intellectuals of artistic but also conspiratorial provenance, providing them with ideological inspiration. He also tried to break down anti-Russian and anti-Communist prejudice he himself had stirred up before the war, wanting to prepare

27. A. Bocheński, *Wędrowki po dziejach przemysłu polskiego*, cz. 2, Warszawa 1969, p. 256; A. Bocheński, *Wędrowki po dziejach przemysłu polskiego*, cz. 3, p. 29; M. Urbanowski, *Mackiewicz versus Skiwski?*, in: *Józef Mackiewicz (1902–1985). Świadek "krótkiego stulecia"*, red. K. Ruchniewicz, M. Zybura, Łomianki 2013, pp. 123–142; A. Bocheński, *Człowiek z głębszego podziemia. Życie i twórczość Jana Emila Skiwskiego*, Kraków 2003, pp. 94–95; J. Mackiewicz, *Fakty, przyroda i ludzie*, Londyn 1993, pp. 114–120.

ground for what he saw as a necessary agreement between Poles and the victorious Soviet Union. This was followed by discussions with Jerzy Borejsza, which had a real impact on the formation of the group "Dziś i Jutro" and the "PAX" Association. Bocheński assumed that the more stable the political situation in Poland, the greater internal autonomy would be granted by the Soviets. Accordingly, any acts of insurgency or pre-insurgency such as the post-war conspiracy for independence were not only doomed to failure but even harmful. He traced evidence to support these claims in Poland's history and presented it in his book *Dzieje głupoty w Polsce* published in 1947, as well as articles in Catholic press.<sup>28</sup>

Bocheński's outlook on Poland's history was based on the existence of political "idiocy in Poland," a result of upbringing rather than national character. For this reason, Bocheński claimed that Poles should combat the belief that Stanisław August Poniatowski and Markgraf Wielopolski were traitors or at least opportunists, whereas Tadeusz Kościuszko and Piotr Wysocki were heroes. Poland may have avoided the partitions by following the policy of cooperation postulated by the king; instead, it put its faith in the aid from the Western countries, Prussian assurances and, most importantly, the efficacy of the patriotic surge. Bocheński concluded that the Bar Confederation preceded the first partition, the Four Years' Sejm

28. AKSCCh, ZAlB, ref. VII A–305, "Jak doszło do powstania 'Dziś i Jutro.' Dyskusja na łamach 'Życia i Myśli' nr II 2 1975 z udziałem: Aleksander Bocheński, Jan Dobraczyński, Jerzy Hagmajer, Mieczysław Kurzyrna, Romuald Szpor" [a draft typescript, the text was never published by the "PAX" association], sheets 8–27; A. Bocheński, *List do nieujawnionych*, "Słowo Powszechne" [hereinafter: SP] 1947 nr 30, p. 1; *Motywy i postawy* [Aleksander Bocheński's utterance], "Kierunki" [hereinafter: K] 1970 nr 48, p. 8; A. Garlicki, *Z tajnych archiwów*, Warszawa 1993, pp. 25–29; W. Kętrzyński, *Na przełomie 1944–1945*, "Więź" 1967 nr 11–12, pp. 160–166; K. Łubieński, *Na starcie. Wspomnienia z lat 1948–1950*, "Przegląd Socjologiczny" 24 (1971), pp. 381–396; J. Majchrowski, *Geneza politycznych ugrupowań katolickich. Stronnictwo Pracy, grupa "Dziś i Jutro"*, Paryż 1984, p. 160; A. Friszke, *Między wojną a więzieniem 1945–1953. Młoda inteligencja katolicka*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 56–59; R. Ptaszyński, *Stommizm. Biografia polityczna Stanisława Stommy*, Kraków 2018, pp. 87–90; R. Mozgól, *Rzyżkowa gra. Jak Aleksander Bocheński przyczynił się do powstania "Dziś i Jutro"*, "Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej" 2007 nr 4, pp. 84–92; M. Zakrzewski, *Dylematy konserwatywnego realizmu w obliczu komunizmu na przykładzie środowiska "Buntu Młodych" i "Polityki"*, in: *Polskie wizje i oceny komunizmu po 1939 roku*, red. R. Łatka, B. Szlachta, Kraków 2015, pp. 261–269; A. Dudek, G. Pytel, *Bolesław Piasecki. Próba biografii politycznej*, Londyn 1990, pp. 159–160; A. Micewski, *Współrzędzić czy nie kłamać. PAX i ZNAK w Polsce 1945–1976*, Kraków 1981, pp. 11–34.

preceded the second, and the Kościuszko Uprising the third one. When the Poles regained their own country thanks to Napoleon, maintaining its independence required cooperation with Emperor Alexander I. Since Duke Józef Poniatowski did not accept the Russian offer before 1812, and the emperor still sought to establish the Kingdom of Poland at the Congress of Vienna, this was a proof that Poles and Russians shared some of their interests. Accordingly, Poles should not have been discouraged by the subsequent exacerbation of relations between Petersburg and Warsaw, but patiently wait for favourable circumstances which would lead to the unification of all Polish territories under the reign of the House of Romanov. The November Uprising was a tragic error, which not only destroyed the Polish autonomy but also reinforced the cult of insurgency. An unfortunate epilogue to this process was the failure of Markgraf Wielopolski, who instead of his compatriots' support for his plans was faced with another disastrous bid for independence. Not only did the January Uprising shatter hope for an autonomous Kingdom of Poland but it also meant the dawn of the terror of Russification, the reinforcement of the coalition of between the countries which signed the partition treaty and the unification of Germany with Prussia as its leader: Bocheński saw this as a catastrophic scenario for Polish independence. Only then did the positivism stemming from the trauma of the uprising and Piłsudski's genius (which he mentioned in an oblique manner) were able to dismantle the suicidal paradigms of Polish political thought. Those paradigms included: "the cursed psychological legacy of the Legion's era," i.e. faith in assistance from France and other West-European countries, preventing Poles from looking for an ally in one partitioner against the other ones, and "insane assumption of Kościuszko's manifesto," according to which the shortest path to a national uprising was all that remained of the political programme of Poland's struggle for independence. Poland regained independence as a result of World War I, which led to the decline of empires that annexed its territories; Poles did not prevent it, as they did not encourage the aggressors to make a new anti-Polish alliance. Unfortunately, the Second Polish Republic reinstated the belief that insurgency was a virtue and condemned political realism as treachery. In turn, this led to the erroneous policy during the Second World War, which reached its peak in the form the Warsaw Uprising. Bocheński appreciated the insurgents' courage, both as a value in itself and as its moral and educational aspect. However, he believed that it was one thing to respect the combatants and the fallen, and quite another to criticise the decision-makers and their wrong choices.

Such criticism should be free of the emotional component but based on rational thinking, and thus harsh and direct.<sup>29</sup>

Bocheński's involvement in Bolesław Piasecki's movement, which quickly took initiative in the activity initiated by the former in Krakow, was limited in the early years of the People's Republic of Poland. He focused mainly on his work in the Legislative Sejm, in which he served as a deputy. Bocheński shared his ideas based on the geopolitical perception of international reality. He only noted that only an alliance with the Soviets could guarantee Poland the western border along rivers Oder and Lusatian Niesse.<sup>30</sup> Over time, he perceived the political ideas of "Dziś i Jutro" and the "PAX" Association more and more negatively, mostly in terms of attempts to reconcile Christianity with Marxism, which lead to increasingly greater subordination of the movement to the authorities. For these reasons, in 1953–1956 he almost entirely severed ties with Piasecki and his acolytes, and stopped publishing his articles.<sup>31</sup>

At that time, Bocheński drew a line at a compromise which in his opinion would harm the nation or the Church. The root cause of this affirmation of the post-Yalta reality was his belief that the situation could not be changed. Poland was too weak to shake off the Soviet hegemony, albeit the latter had certain positive aspects: it put an end to many centuries of the Polish-Russian border dispute and guaranteed a real ally against German power. Bocheński was aware of the effect of socialism on the economic and cultural life of the Polish nation. In his discussions with Borejsza, he tried to guarantee some limited religious and political freedom. However, he also thought that even if such efforts failed, Poles should not attempt to challenge the system which

29. A. Bocheński, *Dzieje głupoty w Polsce. Pamflety dziejopisarskie*, Warszawa 1947, *passim*; A. Bocheński, *O dyskusji nad...*, pp. 1, 4; *Odpowiadam oponentom*, "Tygodnik Powszechny" 1947 nr 7, pp. 6–7.
30. *Czy wskazane jest reklamowanie Dmowskiego. List pisał Bocheńskiego do redakcji "Życia" i kilka słów odpowiedzi*, "Życie Warszawy" 1947 nr 106, p. 2; A. Bocheński, *O polityczny rachunek świata*, SP 1948 nr 1, p. 1; A. Bocheński, *Czwarta rocznica Manifestu Lipcowego*, SP 1948 nr 199, p. 1; Biblioteka Sejmowa, *Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne z 8 posiedzenia Sejmu Ustawodawczego w dniu 22 lutego 1947 r.*, col. 37–40; *Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne z 11 posiedzenia Sejmu Ustawodawczego w dniu 17 kwietnia 1947 r.*, col. 32–35; *Sprawozdanie Stenograficzne z 54 posiedzenia Sejmu Ustawodawczego w dniu 10 lutego 1949 r.*, col. 26.
31. APL, AŁN, ref. 123, Aleksander Bocheński's letter to Stanisław Łoś, undated, Krakow, sheet 177; AIPN, ref. IPN BU 0648/74/1, Aleksander Bocheński's letter to Dominik Horodyński, 18/12/1951, Krakow, sheets 214–215.

was imposed on them. Personally, he did not want to become an active part of reality which failed to meet his expectations, yet it did not alter his view that, overall, the People's Republic of Poland was the only form of Polish statehood at that time.

At that time, Bocheński's aim was a feasible one: to protect the nation from further losses in many areas. He wanted to achieve it by encouraging his compatriots to have a realistic outlook on the situation and cooperate with the new authorities while maintaining ideological identity. Initially, it seemed that there were high chances for such arrangement between the government and the governed, and the movement of committed Catholics would increase such changes. In the dispute between minimalism and minimalism defined by Stanisław Stomma, Bocheński definitely sided with minimalists, i.e. those who thought it was necessary to curb the Catholics' political aspirations. But even in their view the events of the Stalinist period meant the necessity to adopt standpoints which were not uncompromising but which rather treated collaboration with the authorities as opportunist and defeatist. Bocheński was one of those who held such opinion. His vision of national history may have been indicative of opportunist tendencies, but it clearly was in defiance of the prevailing mood among Poles. Apparently, from 1945 to 1956 Bocheński was the closest to the classically-defined political realism.

## 5. Neo-positivism or realism?

Bocheński renewed his activity as a political commentator after 1956, supporting "thaw" processes, as well as briefly engaging with Jan Frankowski's group following its split from "PAX." It appears that he was motivated by a belief that there was no bright political future for Piasecki's association.<sup>32</sup> However, when it turned out that "PAX" would survive thanks to Gomułka's protection, Bocheński again started working more closely with the organisation. Soon

32. AAN, the Authority for Religious Denominations, ref. 93/24, Material concerning Jan Frankowski, sheet 1–3; AIPN, ref. IPN BU 0648/169/2, "Informacja z rozmowy z Piaseckim w dniu 21 IX 1957 r.," sheet 78; report, 25 September 1957, Warsaw, sheet 108; "Informacja dot. działalności części grupy 'Za i przeciw' contra Frankowski J," sheet 111; report, 3 October 1957, Warsaw, sheet 119; "Informacja dot. Micewskiego i Spółki," 4/10/1957, Warsaw, sheet 123; K. Rękas, *Wspomnienie o Aleksandrze Bocheńskim. Konserwatyzm stosowany*, "Najwyższy Czas" 2001 nr 5, p. 32; A. Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL 1945–1980*, Londyn 1994, pp. 190–194; W. Chrzanowski, P. Mierecki, B. Kiernicki, *Pół wieku polityki, czyli rzecz o obronie czynnej*, Warszawa 1997, pp. 245–247; C. Kuta, "Działacze" i "Pismaki." *Aparat bezpieczeństwa wobec katolików świeckich w Krakowie w latach 1957–1989*, Kraków 2009, pp. 321–328.



he wrote approvingly of the course adopted by the organisation towards October transformations, seeing nothing wrong in Piasecki's *Instynkt państwowy* [The State Instinct], and regarded the critique targeted at "PAX" as an unprecedented witch-hunt. Over time, Bocheński identified Piasecki's attitude more and more strongly with that of political realism. He came to a conclusion that the slogan "victor's offences" was a utopia, albeit a harmless one. In his opinion, key tenets of the Association's political thought included its focus on geopolitical realities and the belief that a Catholic in Poland could and should be an advocate of socialism in the economy.<sup>33</sup>

In any case, in terms of economy, at that time Bocheński proposed his specific neo-positivism. He held that Poles should understand post-war circumstances, in which the wealth of the entire society translated into personal wealth. Accordingly, Poles should understand the need of economic sacrifice for the sake of increasing production performance. Stefan Kisielewski briefly summarized this stance as follows: "grab everyone by the scruff and force them to produce."<sup>34</sup> Bocheński argued that Poland's international position after the war depended on its economic rather than military potential. For this reason, all Poles should actively partake in the "race of the nations," striving to improve the performance of the national economy.<sup>35</sup>

Still, Bocheński's reflection went much further. He justified his support for centrally-planned economy not only by political realities but also by increasingly intense apology of socialist ideas. In his view, due to technological development, the world inevitably entered the phase of the progressive automation of production, which would ultimately lead to a complete replacement of human labour by machines and the excess of material goods. He also argued that the economy of the world of "universal happiness" he envisaged (to start in 2005) would have to be managed centrally by computers.

33. A. Bocheński, *25 lat na trudnej drodze (przemówienie wygłoszone w czasie uroczystego zebrania Zarządu Stowarzyszenia PAX w dn. 28.XI.1970 r.)*, "Biuletyn Wewnętrzny Oddziałów Stowarzyszenia PAX" 1970 nr 12, pp. 15–18; *Aleksander Bocheński's speech on the 25th anniversary of the "PAX" Society*, "Zorza" 1970 nr 50, p. 2; A. Bocheński, *Pamięci Bolesława*, "Zorza" 1979 nr 5, p. 2.
34. A. Bocheński, *Niektóre zagadnienia przedsiębiorczości człowieka w gospodarce socjalistycznej*, K 1964 nr 24, pp. 2–3, 6; A. Bocheński, *Za krótka koldra*, SP 1967 nr 23, p. 2; A. Bocheński, *O komputerach*, SP 1967 nr 31, p. 2; A. Bocheński, *Komentarze i wycinki*, K 1968 nr 5, p. 11; S. Kisielewski, *Abecadło Kisiela*, Warszawa 1990, p. 11.
35. A. Bocheński, *Miejsce Polski w wielkim wyścigu*, SP 1959 nr 2, p. 3; A. Bocheński, *O nasze miejsce w wyścigu narodów*, SP 1959 nr 304, p. 3; A. Bocheński, *O miejsce Polski w wyścigu narodów*, SP 1962 nr 20, p. 3.

Moreover, even the road to widespread automation required an intensification of manufacturing activities, best supported by state-controlled economy.<sup>36</sup>

At that time, Bocheński claimed that the realistic view was one of the permanence of the post-war order in the world and involved his full and continued criticism of national uprisings. Note that his attitude did not make him popular among the "PAX" Association, which he finally joined in 1962.<sup>37</sup> Bocheński's goal, both under Gierek and Gomułka, was to work towards the economic prosperity of the Polish nation. He tried to implement his programme by criticising the economic negligence of consecutive governments but also by insistently appealing to Polish patriotism, which was to be expressed in conscientious everyday work. Was it realistic to expect that it would bring the expected results? Bocheński was aware that the system in which the means of production were socialised reinforced disrespect for the common good. On the other hand, if another economic model was inconceivable, internal emigration was the only alternative to neo-positivism. Was his realism again a tragic one, this time in economic terms? Considering Bocheński's genuine conviction that the whole world was turning towards planned economy, the answer to this question cannot be fully positive. Although a realist does not need to be able to predict the future, they should also avoid becoming an advocate of utopian ideas. Obviously, in the 1960s there were many signs that the technological development would lead to the eradication of mass poverty, which today seems a very remote vision — to say the least. Nonetheless, in his concept of a "world without work" he did not ask who would perform policing or educational functions, or the functions of the state in general. Will the state be obsolete in the age of universal automation? Or perhaps it will also be replaced by machines? Bocheński was unable to provide a convincing answer to such questions. Yet his realistic view

36. A. Bocheński, *Czy nowy podział na ludzi i małpy?*, Warszawa 1965, *passim*; A. Bocheński, *Pseudosapiens — albo sens i bezsens ludzkiej pracy*, Warszawa 1979, *passim*; A. Bocheński, *Perspektywy kapitalizmu*, SP 1975 nr 10, p. 3; A. Bocheński, *Krytyk ekonomii zachodniej*, SP 1976 nr 131, p. 3; *Każdemu to, co lubi. Rozmowa z Aleksandrem Bocheńskim*, „WTK. Tygodnik Katolików” 1979 nr 39, pp. 1, 4.
37. AKSCCh, ZAIB, Aleksandra Bocheński's application to the Board of the PAX Association for membership in the Association, 8 February 1962, no page nr; Aleksandra Bocheński's personal questionnaire, no page nos.; AIPN, IPN BU 0648/56/2, memo, 29 January 1962, sheet 45; A. Bocheński, *Rozmyślenia krytyczne. Błąd Zbigniewa Florczaka*, K 1956 nr 2, p. 1; A. Bocheński, Letter to the editor, 24 September 1957, "Kultura" 1957 nr 11, p. 152; A. Bocheński, *Drugi artykuł o margrabim*, K 1958 nr 11, p. 1; *Analiza polityczna artykułu Jerzego Łojka*, K 1958 nr 1, p. 7.

on geopolitics with a strong economic touch, accentuating the idea of the "race of the nations," was compatible with the ideological vision of the Polish economy, or at least with overly optimistic reflections on its future.

## 6. Anti-insurgent flashbacks:

### Jaruzelski as the new Stanisław August

At the end of the 1970s, it appeared that Bocheński was readying himself for his retirement from journalism. However, the crisis of 1980 and its aftermath changed his plans, and he renewed his work as a political commentator, concentrating on the presentation of historical analogies between Poland's situation in previous epochs and in the 1980s. To Bocheński, who had just reissued his *Dzieje głupoty...*, the rise of the "Solidarity" movement brought Poland to a situation akin to that under the reign of Stanisław August or Markgraf Wielopolski's rule. On the one hand, there was a politically inconsiderate nation in a patriotic rapture; on the other hand, a leader trying to introduce careful reforms whilst trying not to antagonise the Russian hegemony. Therefore, if General Jaruzelski was to continue the policy of the leaders mentioned above, he had to avoid their mistakes, i.e. Poniatowski's indecision or Wielopolski's inability to control the nation. Consequently, the introduction of martial law was in Bocheński's view one of the few "victories of reason over idiocy in Poland." Bocheński supported the decision, justifying it both by the threat of Russian intervention, as well as the need to curb "anarchy in the country."<sup>38</sup>

Criticism of the government, he argued, was necessary, but it had to be constructive. Initially, he saw that the Patriotic National Revival Movement as a forum for such critique, but he quickly became disappointed with the organisation. Similarly, he was very sceptical towards the ideas for an economic reform formulated and implemented by Jaruzelski's team; he treated them

38. *Cały naród bazą sojuszu polsko-radzieckiego* [Aleksander Bocheński's utterance], SP 1980 nr 242, p. 3; A. Bocheński, *Polski kryzys polityczny*, "Rzeczpospolita" 1982 nr 33, p. 2; "Mówię, co myślę w sposób surowy i szczerzy." Z Aleksandrem Bocheńskim rozmawia Stanisław Kuszewski, "Stolica" 1984 nr 45, pp. 4–5; A. Bocheński, *Porozumienie a zrozumienie*, "Nowe Drogi" 1984 nr 8, p. 104; "Dzieje głupoty w Polsce" i co dalej? Rozmowa z pisarzem Aleksandrem Bocheńskim, "Gazeta Krakowska" 1985 nr 161, p. 3; *O prawdzie i rozumie. Rozmowa z Aleksandrem Bocheńskim*, "Dziennik Bałtycki" 1984 nr 192, p. 3; *Polska racja stanu. Dyskusja redakcyjna* [Aleksander Bocheński's utterance], "Za i Przeciw" 1985 nr 40, p. 5; *Opóźnienie czy degradacja. Irena Maślińska rozmawia z Aleksandrem Bocheńskim*, "Kontrasty" 1987 nr 11, pp. 16–17, 20.

as unrealistic attempts to graft certain mechanisms of the market onto the planned economy, which, to make matters worse, was devoid of substantial amounts of capital. Consequently, his commentaries, although containing a wealth of economic reflection, were an affirmation of the government's activity due to geopolitical considerations, a throwback to his deliberations from the early post-war years.<sup>39</sup>

Was it realism or rather pseudorealism? Bocheński relied on a logical analysis of the outcome of the Soviet hegemony for Poland. For a person who survived the entire post-war period and personally experienced that power of the Soviet regime it was difficult to imagine that the regime would come to terms with the existence of an independent trade union in a dependent country. Not only Bocheński but also a number of other intellectuals believed that even the Soviet Union was in crisis, it was a monolithic superpower and his dominance in Central Europe was at no risk. The course of events at the end of the decade was indeed hard to predict; note that a political realist does not have to be a political visionary.

However, it does not mean that one can be an ignoramus on the subject on which one speaks with confidence, which is the impression we have when reading about Bocheński's economic considerations. Obviously, an attempt to introduce workers' self-government in the economy of the People's Republic of Poland was pointless; still, can we expect that a system with a dictatorially-empowered "economic manager" at the helm, as postulated by Bocheński, would be effective? Just like Bocheński failed to predict the collapse of the Soviet Union, he was also unable to imagine an effective implementation of market economy in a country in which the system of centrally-planned economy had been in operation for nearly five decades. In the 1980s, historical reminiscences made it harder for Bocheński to objectively (and thus realistically) assess the situation, sometimes leading him to erroneous conclusions.

39. AAN, the Patriotic National Revival Movement. The National Council in Warsaw 1982–1989, Interim National Council of the Patriotic National Revival Movement, ref. I/1, "Lista członków Tymczasowej Rady Krajowej PRON," sheet 17; Organisational Department, ref. WO I/9, "Ankieta uczestnika I Kongresu PRON Aleksandra Bocheńskiego," sheet 25; *Lista członków Tymczasowej Rady Krajowej PRON*, "Trybuna Ludu" 1982 nr 301, p. 4; A. Bocheński, *Mózg naukowca czy talent menadżera*, "WTK" 1980 nr 46, pp. 1, 9; A. Bocheński, *Inflacja i deflacja*, "Za i Przeciw" 1983 nr 6, p. 4; *Przechadzki z Aleksandrem Bocheńskim. Na mieliznie*, "Odrodzenie" 1986 nr 7, p. 7; A. Orzełek, *Aleksander Bocheński wobec działalności i koncepcji Patriotycznego Ruchu Odrodzenia Narodowego*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 2018 nr 1, pp. 163–179.

## 7. Disappointed with independence

In the age of political transformation Bocheński was not convinced as to its permanent effects. He criticised the policy of Solidarity governments for their trust in the West and downplaying the social cost of economic transformation; he did not believe in the stability of the nascent Polish democracy, either.<sup>40</sup> In his eyes, the European Union was a "giant on feet of clay," and Poland's aspirations to membership in NATO were absurd and ignored geopolitical realities. Bocheński held that if the policy of Poland depended mostly on its relations with Germany and Russia, the inclusion of the English-speaking countries or the French by Polish diplomats should be of secondary importance to relations with the two powerful neighbours. Bocheński also claimed that to Germans "Poland would never be European," i.e. it would never be a valuable ally; accordingly, decent relations with Moscow were necessary, up to and including the efforts aimed at building a Euro-Asian bloc in post-soviet countries, in which Warsaw, aside from Kremlin, would play a dominant role. The idea, unpopular on a national scale, was inspiring to the circles of the "Myśl Polska" weekly, with whom Bocheński maintained close relations towards the end of his life.<sup>41</sup>

Assuming the classical interpretation of geopolitics, Bocheński believed that Poland lies between Germany and Russia (rather than between Russia and the American bloc). He ridiculed Americans' good intentions, arguing that from their standpoint the Baltic Sea was just one of many strategic areas, and certainly not the most important one. Until the end of his life, he relied on the concept of the alliance with the power which shared more interests with Poland and from which Poland could gain more. Was an alliance with Russia realistic in this context? The question may be reversed, i.e. we may ask if it is realistic to expect that the West would offer unconditional help to Poland in the light of previous historical experience. Bocheński opposed anti-Russian phobias, according to which an independent Poland was doomed to conflict with Russia. Denouncing "eastern martyrology" and a general

40. *Za mało w nas racjonalizmu i pragmatyzmu. Z Aleksandrem Bocheńskim rozmawia Zofia Zdrojkowska*, SP 1989 nr 155, p. 3; *Przy telefonie Aleksander Bocheński*, "Tygodnik Polski" 1989 nr 40, p. 1; *W opinii Aleksandra Bocheńskiego*, SP 1989 nr 208, p. 3; *W opinii Aleksandra Bocheńskiego*, SP 1989 nr 230, p. 11; A. Bocheński, *Wenezuela?*, "Polityka" 1993 nr 26, p. 2.

41. *Za mało w nas...*, p. 3; *Aleksander Bocheński. Lepiej być mądrym* [an interview], "Elle" 1997 nr 11, pp. 58–62.

tendency to perceive current politics through the prism of past suffering, he expected that the leaders of Poland's foreign policy would act realistically.<sup>42</sup> Remarkably, on matters of Eastern or Atlantic policy he was poles apart from his friend Jerzy Giedroyc, a proponent of the renewal of the Jagiellonian idea while leveraging the asset of Poland's aspirations to become a member of NATO and the EU. Bocheński, a pre-war supporter of the Ukrainian issue, treated it after 1989 as a marginal subject, arguing that there were only three political organisms between the Rhine and the Volga: Germany, Poland and Russia. He held that the potential of Poland and the countries which came into being as a result of the USSR's fragmentation were unable to counter-balance the power of Germany or Russia, much less the combine potential of both great powers.

The aged commentator believed that there was a possibility of a mental breakthrough in the Polish nation in favour of rationalism in politics, the start of which would be the new "rebellion of the young." If young people were able to voice their emotions in the streets on mundane things, why would they not want to overthrow the archaic political class? He considered preparations for such revolution the final task in his life. Was Bocheński then an advocate of anti-systemic movements? He might have been one; most importantly as a man who believed that young Poles would break the cycle of "idiocy in Poland."<sup>43</sup>

## 8. In search of political realism

In his work as political commentator and activist, Bocheński undoubtedly wished to serve Poland's *raison d'état*, defining such service primarily as working towards the reinforcement of the nation's potential. The obstacles he encountered were both objective (the country's situation between German and Russian powers) and subjective (the nation's propensity to Romantic raptures in politics instilled by education, as well as its aversion to rational

42. A. Bocheński, *Dzieje głupoty w Polsce. Pamflety dziejopisarskie*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 271–272.

43. A. Bocheński, *Erotyczna czy polityczna?*, "Kontrasty" 1986 nr 6, pp. 5–7; *Splunąć w dłoń* [wywiad z Aleksandrem Bocheńskim] "Razem" 1988 nr 42, pp. 10–11; K. Rękas, *Dwa pogrzeby*, "Myśl Polska" 2001 nr 4, p. 14; K. Rękas, *Sapere auso...*, pp. 2–5. In this context it is worth noting that in 1990, writing about the farmers' disillusionment with their previous representatives, he foresaw the rise of an "anti-systemic" politician like Andrzej Lepper. *W opinii Aleksandra Bocheńskiego. Jedno hasło i jeden przywódca*, SP 1990 nr 58, p. 2.

analysis and conscientious everyday work). Bocheński wished to achieve his goal mostly by writing, aware of the importance of the written word among his audience. Accordingly, political commentary was instrumental to the realisation of his ideas. On the other hand, as a means of expression, it was also a self-contained element of his realistic reflection. Thus, Bocheński aspired to be a political realist both in theory and in practice.

He mostly looked for possibilities of the application of a realistic way of political thinking in the Polish context. The goal he formulated was highly demanding in the Polish realities, and yet to give it up would indeed mean to abandon advocating rationalism in politics altogether. If he was a political realist, it does not mean that he had follow this trend in each of his articles and his every concept. In fact, his realism was predominately pessimistic: he was well-aware that his ideas were salutary as much as unpopular. Therefore it was not accident that he cited Georges Clemenceau's words "When I think that I'm right, I'm a hardliner."<sup>44</sup>

44. ODiZP, ref. BC159064, *Aleksander Bocheński – wstęp do rozmowy...*, reż. R. Kruszelnicka, Poland 1989.

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# Abstract

Ariel Orzełek

*Aleksander Bocheński and his political realism –  
an outline*

Political realism is not easy to define. The analysis of specific cases may help. In this text, I wonder whether Aleksander Bocheński was a political realist. His journalism has undergone a significant evolution. He was a supporter of the Polish "power state" before 1939, he wanted to collaborate with the nazi Germans during the war years, and after the war he was an apologist for People's Poland and a critic of the Third Polish Republic. My considerations prove, that Bocheński was looking for political realism in his life and oeuvre, not always, however, entering this trend of reflection on politics.

**Keywords:**  
Aleksander  
Bocheński,  
journalism, PAX  
Association,  
political realism,  
political thought

# Abstrakt

Ariel Orzełek

## *Aleksander Bocheński a realizm polityczny – zarys problemu*

**Słowa kluczowe:**  
Aleksander  
Bocheński,  
myśl polityczna,  
publicystyka,  
realizm polityczny,  
Stowarzyszenie  
„PAX”

Realizm polityczny jest pojęciem trudnym w definicji. Pomocna może być w tym przypadku analiza specyficznych przykładów. Niniejszy tekst dotyczy problemu realizmu w myśli politycznej Aleksandra Bocheńskiego. Wyrażana przez publicystykę, ulegała znamiennej ewolucji. Przed 1939 rokiem Bocheński był rzecznikiem Polski „mocarstwowej”, podczas wojny snuł plany kolaboracji z Niemcami, po 1945 roku był apologetą Polski Ludowej, broniąc jej także w III Rzeczypospolitej. Szukał politycznego realizmu, nie oznacza to jednak, że zawsze udawało mu się pozostawać w tym nurcie refleksji o polityce.