

The Polish Liberal Project in Jan Krzysztof Bielecki's Policy Statement

SŁAWOMIR DRELICH

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń

Jan Krzysztof Bielecki's liberal project—introduction

The office of the first non-communist prime minister in post-war Poland was held by Tadeusz Mazowiecki. Linked with Solidarity from its beginnings, Mazowiecki began his political career in the PAX Association, on whose behalf he was elected to the Sejm of the Polish People's Republic. Mazowiecki's biography perfectly exemplifies the struggle of the generation which grew up during occupation and in Stalinist times, with a political regime imposed on the Poles. Mazowiecki's policy statement, delivered on 24 August 1989, undoubtedly marked a symbolic end of the communist era in Poland. Although the message of Mazowiecki's statement suited the period of transition that Poland was about to undergo, it did not provide a specific vision of Poland's new political system.

Mazowiecki was succeeded by Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, a politician younger than him by a generation; Bielecki was born in the Polish People's Republic, and was also associated with Solidarity's expert committee. While this organization essentially provided Bielecki with the first experience in his social and political career, he is considered as one of the so called "Gdańsk liberals" (Knoch 2015: 111–114). This is why Bielecki's policy statement differed significantly from the policy statement of his opponent, as it includes a more precisely-put idea of the new political, economic and social system.

The fundamental aim of this paper is to present the systemic model and its main provisions, expressed in Bielecki's policy statement made in the Sejm on 5 January 1991. This model may be described as liberal or liberal-democratic, and its foundations are: (1) on a political level—representative democracy with the guarantee of civil liberties and the prevalence of political rights; (2) on an economic level—free market capitalism, with a considerable emphasis on the superiority of private property over its other forms, the guarantee of full competition for economic entities, and the promotion of entrepreneurship; (3) on social level—civil society with a proposal of boosting civil participation and local governance. The conclusions presented in the paper have been drawn based on the analysis of Prime Minister Bielecki's policy statement mentioned above, whose content will be assessed against various liberal-democratic ideas.

On the day before he made his policy statement, while he was still a candidate for Prime Minister, Bielecki said that his government had been formed "in accordance with the logic of acceleration" (*Transcript*: 11).¹ This statement was compatible with the idea of a liberal revolution which accompanied the Gdańsk liberals' reflections in the 1980s (Biegasiewicz 2013: 82–83; Gadomski 1991: 9); and although it was not entirely consistent with Popper's idea of evolutionism that is typical of liberals, it did stem from a deep conviction that a gradual reform of dysfunctional centrally planned economic system might not bring fast and satisfying results. Along with sharing responsibility for holding power, as shown by Bielecki's government, Gdańsk liberals tried to combine the myth of a liberal revolution with the strategy of political pragmatism. The newly elected Prime Minister assured the Sejm that "pragmatism does not exclude the ideological approach" (*Transcript*: 166), but

¹ All quotations from Jan Krzysztof Bielecki's policy statement as well as from his other speeches made during the Sejm's session on 4 and 5 January 1991, are taken from the official transcript of the session posted on the Sejm's website. The original page numbers are preserved. Source: <http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/>, 14.01.2018. Further quoted as: *Transcript* (Polish: *Stenogram*).

ultimately pragmatism and political realism prevailed. Jerzy Szacki pointed out that taking action aimed at achieving such liberal revolution in practice “inevitably entailed ... following the road of utopian social engineering which was not previously used by politicians presenting liberal programmes” (Szacki 1994: 181). Bruce Ackerman found this liberal revolution difficult, but possible to conduct. According to Ackerman,

... liberal revolution is hard work—harder than the revolutionary exercises proposed by religious and nationalist rivals, who can offer a deep spiritual satisfaction that liberals deny themselves (Ackerman 1996: 27).

Wojciech Sadurski has emphasized that most liberals believe that “in a liberal programme, there is no room for excitement, passion or public sentiment” (Sadurski 2003: 55) and perhaps that is why it is not a “thrilling” ideology, and its proposals do not necessarily captivate many people. On the other hand, as Andrzej Szahaj points out, “liberalism still seems to be the best cure for fundamentalism” (Szahaj 2000: 271). Therefore, the project of liberal Poland suggested by Bielecki was in a way a response to an expectation of liberal revolution among Gdańsk liberals and their close circles, as well as a response to an expectation of a radical structural transformation of the country, which would make it possible to promptly meet the society's high expectations. Bielecki proposed “a programme of creating market order” (*Transcript*: 159), at the same time stressing that “Poland is the most successful among Eastern European countries in pushing forward with the introduction of the market economy” (*Transcript*: 162). The main idea of the project was freedom—especially economic, but also political, civil and personal; as well as the belief that “we can make good use of the freedom we have regained” (*Transcript*: 158–159). In his political statement, Bielecki referred to the fundamental values of classic liberal axiology, which will be presented in the main part of this paper.

Building economic liberalism

In *Capitalism of Fine Print* (Polish: *Kapitalizm drobnego druku*), a book particularly critical of introducing the economic liberal model in Poland in the 1990s, Andrzej Szahaj points out that “we live ... in a country where the attempt to introduce a neoliberal ideology met with great enthusiasm” (Szahaj 2014: 15), and “the Polish variety of this ideology

monopolized the way we think about economy, a good society and a good life” (Szahaj 2014: 16). Szacki shares this viewpoint, but also realizes that “economic liberalism had to start by accepting the utopia of capitalism and searching for ways to adjust it to a reluctant reality” (Szacki 1994: 185). Therefore, he was not surprised by Polish liberals’ susceptibility to neoliberal and economy-centric dogmatism. They believed that “a coherent model of capitalism” was the only alternative to the inefficiency of a centrally planned economy. Szacki seems to acknowledge that all mixed models and even the slightest deviations from economic liberalism “for Eastern European liberals ... were simply inconsistent, lacked boldness, and yielded to socialist ways of thinking” (Szacki 1994: 186). That is why subjecting the project of restructuring Poland to the model of economic liberalism is clearly visible in Bielecki’s policy statement. Indeed, one can gain an impression that all other liberties are dependent upon economic freedom. At the very beginning of his speech, the new Prime Minister declares that “the government will concentrate mostly on restructuring the Polish economy” (*Transcript*: 158). Bielecki emphasizes multiple times that “our goal has been to build a market economy” (*Transcript*: 159). This vision is not as radical as Ayn Rand’s utopia, which—according to Ryszard Legutko—“prevents anything that is not capitalism, classifying it as barbarian” (Legutko 1994: 160).

Making economic liberalism a central point in the project of Poland’s new political, social and economic system seems to be a continuation of the idea developed by Mirosław Dzielski, for whom “economy is the factor preventing totalitarianism” (Dzielski 1989: 180); and economic changes were to be a foundation for subsequent political and social changes. Dzielski, invoking Adam Smith’s classic ideas, was convinced that “an economically active entity focused on its own benefit indirectly serves the public interest” (Dzielski 2007: 91–92). Bielecki also seems to consider economic liberalism as a starting point for ensuring future well-being. In his speech he does try to soften the strictly liberal line by pointing out that “we are seeking the golden mean between regulation and control, which enforce the rules of trade honesty, and a spontaneous development of financial services” (*Transcript*: 160). The aforementioned “golden mean” should be interpreted as acknowledging the role of the state and political elites in building a new capitalistic order; this is why Szacki refers to the conclusion drawn by Claus Offe, in the context of a Polish transformation in the neoliberal spirit: “a capitalism designed, organized and introduced by reformative elites” (Szacki 1994: 182).

In his political statement, Bielecki also places importance on “trade honesty,” which may be associated with capitalistic projects of Rand

and Dzielski. It does not mean that Bielecki sought direct inspiration from both thinkers, although he had undoubtedly known Dzielski's publications as well as some of Rand's texts; rather, referring to a trader's role model seems to invoke the same trade ethos that formed the basis of economic liberalism. For Rand:

A trader is a man who earns what he gets and does not give or take the undeserved. He does not treat men as masters or slaves, but as independent equals. He deals with men by means of a free, voluntary, unforced, uncoerced exchange—an exchange which benefits both parties by their own independent judgment. A trader does not expect to be paid for his defaults, only for his achievements. He does not switch to others the burden of his failures, and he does not mortgage his life into bondage to the failures of others. (Rand 2000: 35–36)

According to Dzielski, it is creative entrepreneurs who should shape economic development, while smart politicians should understand those “creators of wealth” and should not hinder their activity with “privilege, duty, tax, demagoguery, or unstable currency” (Dzielski 2007: 156–157). Tadeusz Syryjczyk emphasized that a social system based on a free-market economy is essential for trade civilization, which is opposed to the civilization of conquerors and war (Syryjczyk 2007: 207). These reflections relate to the conclusions of Friedrich August von Hayek, who was convinced that

... governments ... that gave greater independence and security to individuals engaged in trading benefited from the increased information and larger population that resulted. (Hayek 2004: 69)

That is why, in his policy statement, Bielecki promises that “we will support entrepreneurship and efficiency” (*Transcript*: 158). He also convinces his listeners that Polish authorities try to take further steps which will give more freedom to entrepreneurs and guarantee the bases for a free-market economy. Bielecki is glad that

... as the only post-communist country Poland has made this critical step on the way to free-market economy. Our zloty has become real money, worth saving and exchangeable for foreign currencies. (*Transcript*: 159)

This capitalistic ethos was an essential element of the project of “democratic capitalism” proposed by Lech Mazewski in “Przegląd Polityczny” (Mazewski 1991: 21–22), which Bielecki was in favour of. Bielecki's project, dominated by the economic liberalism ideology, resembles not only Dzielski's, Rand's and Austrian economists' considerations, but also the pre-war ideas of

Cracovian economists; mainly those of Adam Krzyżanowski, Adam Heydl or Ferdynand Zweig (Rogaczewska 2011: 224–227; Bernacki 2004: 162–181). According to them, “the right to freedom is exercised through securing free-market processes effectively” (Charchuła 2016: 218). Bielecki appears to understand that free-market Poland has become a part of “an all-powerful market which unifies people’s tastes on a national scale” (*Transcript*: 166); it has thus become a part of the global economy, and as such it has to adapt to its current reality. It was also relevant that in the view of Bielecki’s and Polish liberals, the turn of the 1980s and 1990s (the era of near-universal appreciation for the gains of Reaganism and Thatcherism and Francis Fukuyama’s announcement of “the end of history”) must have confirmed the validity of the direction of change they had taken.

Bielecki regards “property and competition” as a key to “long-term growth” (*Transcript*: 159). His ideas do not differ much from those of classic liberals, for example John Locke’s, for whom “a man, being master of himself and proprietor of his own person and the actions or labour of it, had still in himself the great foundation of property” (Locke 1992: 193–194). Private property, according to Adam Smith, was to be the source of wealth for people, and as a result, the source of wealth for entire nations (Smith 2007: 631–632). Moreover, as per David Hume’s idea, property should be seen here not only as a legal but also as a moral relation (Hume 2005: 565–569). Ludwig von Mises interprets it as “the only real system of human cooperation within the society based on the division of labour” (Mises 2009: 36), while Hayek notices that property rights are the reason for the development of trade and for the consistent increase in the efficiency of labour and production (Hayek 2004: 26–27). Bielecki’s classic liberal understanding of property was reflected in the essential programme proposals of his party, for example in the so-called little privatization, or the general enfranchisement described as the “great privatization.” According to Bielecki, “small privatization” guarantees “the fastest market results and forms the bases for creating the middle class” (*Transcript*: 159), and at the same time boosts individual entrepreneurship. On the other hand, “the great privatization” plan, which was to entail “the general enfranchisement creating such conditions that everyone could be a real owner of a part of state assets” (*Transcript*: 160), was ultimately supposed to lead to a dynamic development of “the capital market in Poland and an entire network of financial institutions being a true nerve of the market economy” (*ibid.*). The programme of general privatization was to be a top-down division of state assets between all citizens, therefore making

every Polish person an owner (Lewandowski & Szomburg 1991: 25). The Prime Minister convinced us that the government “will not hinder bottom-up privatization activities or postpone them until an unknown future” (*Transcript*: 162). At the same time he promised to “fully respect the property of foreign agents” (*ibid.*). Importantly, Bielecki emphasized the value of private property in Polish history, reminding people that “in the most severe times of hardship, the Polish identity, tradition and the persecuted private property were preserved in the Polish countryside” (*ibid.*). The suggested model of capitalism, and also the model of securing property, was to resemble the Anglo-Saxon model more than any form of national or corporate capitalism (Szomburg 2000: 647). According to Szacki, the programmes were outlined not only under the influence of “global trends,” but also under the conviction that neoliberal solutions were “the most coherent model of capitalism as a system opposed to socialism in every respect” (Szacki 1994: 185). It was also believed that “arrangements inconsistent with orthodox liberalism have a logical basis for existence only in countries that had already achieved prosperity thanks to having had a free market for a long time” (Szacki 1994: 186).

Man in the liberal economy universe

In addition to the foundations for building a free market economy in Poland, Bielecki's policy statement also includes numerous reflections of a strictly anthropological nature. Hence, Bielecki does not concern himself only with the faith in “the liberating power of the free market” (Ackerman 1996: 41), but also with the awareness that an effective free-market economy cannot be built arbitrarily, without citizens' involvement. The citizens in this case are entrepreneurs, employees and consumers. In his speech, Bielecki describes an active, entrepreneurial and creative man who treats his work as a form of self-fulfilment and a way to change the surrounding environment. Charchuła points out that the individualism which Gdańsk liberals believed in “puts the individual in the central position in the social life structure. The individual is not only the subject, but also the real creator” (Charchuła 2016: 109). Bielecki stated that his government's aim would be to “awaken individual ambitions and national aspirations” (*Transcript*: 158); that he would do anything in his power to “make room for human energy and entrepreneurship” as it was “the basis of our economic philosophy”

(*Transcript*: 159). This undoubtedly stems from one of the principal values of liberalism—individualism. According to William Galston,

... to individualism corresponds the liberal virtue of independence—the disposition to care for and take responsibility for oneself and to avoid becoming needlessly dependent on others. (Galston 1999: 243)

Bielecki espouses the liberal notion of *vita activa* developed by Wilhelm von Humboldt, according to which a man is the main driver of development, progress and improvement through his boundless creative energy. Indeed, to quote John Stuart Mill, “energy may be turned to bad uses; but more good may always be made of an energetic nature, than of an indolent and impassive one” (Mill 2002: 75), for “individuality is the same thing as development” (Mill 2002: 79). Thus, it is not a surprise when Bielecki promises that “the programme of building market order will be directed mainly at people, their abilities, their faith in the purpose of work and resourcefulness” (*Transcript*: 159). Gdańsk liberals, including Bielecki, realized that in Polish society decades of communism had resulted in learned helplessness, apathy and unwillingness to take action. Janusz Lewandowski emphasized that in the transformation process it would be essential to “overcome the hidden evil of communism in the form of habits and mentality deeply rooted in Poland, hindering the development of the market and democracy” (Lewandowski 1998: 156). That is why in his speech Bielecki appreciated the Catholic Church’s “efforts to revive the nation’s morality” (*Transcript*: 163). Such morality is a *sine qua non* for building Polish liberalism in an effective way. However, this statement by the Prime Minister should not be considered equivalent to rejecting the typically liberal rule of a secular state which is ideologically, philosophically and religiously neutral. Rather, Bielecki promised that they would “follow the traditional rule of ideological tolerance” (*ibid.*). He realized that it was a necessary condition for individual freedom and an essential guarantee of the individual’s autonomy.

Bielecki was not, however, a blind follower of what Marcin Król described as “a neoliberal economic theology” (Król 2005: 51). On the one hand, he promised to remove all barriers in the state economy, enabling real free competition. On the other hand, he realized that it was not possible without an appropriate stance of the state. So he tried, again, to find the golden mean between Adam Smith and the moral point of his economic doctrine, and between Friedrich August von Hayek and his spontaneously ordered utopia. Some describe this attitude as “pragmatic liberalism” (Biegasiewicz 2011: 92). Certainly, however, Bielecki’s policy

statement exemplifies a tendency noticed by Król in the modern liberal thought (neoliberal thought, in fact), as a consequence of which “economy tries to dominate politics” (Król 2005: 53). For Bielecki, personal freedom is mainly a tool for economic growth, which should be ensured by the so-called “small entrepreneurship.” Bielecki mentioned that it was necessary that state authorities create “more favourable conditions for the development of small businesses in our country,” because “these businesses are crucial as they make the economy more flexible” (*Transcript*: 160); he added that “entrepreneurs must be provided with good investment opportunities” (*Transcript*: 162). Bielecki gave an assurance that “Poland is and will be a politically stable country, where one can invest safely and on optimum conditions” (*ibid.*). Thus, the role of the state is crucial in creating the framework for a market economy and in securing the private business sphere. He claimed that “a responsible wage policy” and a consistent lowering of “wage limitations as privatization progresses” were necessary (*Transcript*: 159). The state’s duty should also be to “defend the balance,” while “maintaining the economic balance will require applying the principle of a balanced budget” (*ibid.*). Thus, on the one hand, Bielecki was convinced that “we ought to break the monopoly in agriculture, especially trade and services” (*Transcript*: 161), while on the other, he announced that the government will “effectively protect our farmers against unfair competition from abroad, and against agricultural import at artificially lowered prices” (*ibid.*). That is why it would be an overstatement to claim that in their “liberals’ quarter” (Mazur 1991: 13) Gdańsk liberals used Bielecki and other Liberal-Democratic Congress politicians to introduce a neoliberal utopia in Poland. Nevertheless, one could rightfully claim that the sphere of personal freedom was often subordinated to economic freedom and the idea of the free market.

The development of business was ultimately supposed to lead to modernization—the key word in the liberal discourse of the 1990s. Bielecki announced that his government did not intend to

... passively wait for bankruptcy, but to build a substitute labour market in areas threatened with unemployment, for example by creating special business zones which would attract national and international investors. (*Transcript*: 162)

He assured farmers that the government would promote “not only the modernization of agricultural production, but also the development of a wide range of services created by the country’s inhabitants themselves” (*Transcript*: 161). Although he was aware that numerous anachronistic state enterprises would have to go into liquidation during the economic

transformation, he believed that thanks to the state's actions, "the bankruptcy process does not need to be so rapid" (*Transcript*: 162). Bielecki was certain that unfavourable economic phenomena would be temporary, and that the best way to protect the society against them would be to invest in educating employees so that they could accept the new economic reality. The Prime Minister stated that "filling the staff vacancies and preparing managers are crucial elements of our strategy" (*Transcript*: 159). He envisaged educating "the staff who would be the future agents of the free market: managers, bankers, financiers and brokers" (*ibid.*). The faith in the driving force and power of education has been a classic theme in liberal political thought since its very beginning. For instance, John Stuart Mill indicated that "people should be so taught and trained in youth as to know and benefit by the ascertained results of human experience" (Mill 2002: 73). In his texts, Bielecki invoked Mill's essay *On Liberty* and Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiment*, emphasizing the great value of education and upbringing:

But ethics in liberalism does not only entail paying taxes. Ethics entails working hard and being honest; if you are a business owner, a doctor or a teacher, it entails broadening your knowledge; if you are a manufacturer, it entails maintaining the quality of your products and being honest about expiry dates; if you are a driver, ethics entails being rested and alert behind the wheel. Democracy and free economy die without honesty, because if there is no honesty, people cannot trust each other or any institutions. (Bielecki 1998: 188)

According to Bielecki, only a liberal economy would allow young trained people "to get a chance of a rapid promotion" (*Transcript*: 159). The government would focus on developing "programmes enabling employees to change their job or profession which could give them new prospects" (*Transcript*: 162). The Prime Minister especially urged young people:

I would like to personally address young people—become dynamic managers, ambitious politicians, competent teachers, brilliant local activists! Set up companies and shops, make a career and develop your competences—state administration is waiting for you. (*Transcript*: 166)

Bielecki was convinced that "Poland needs the energy, courage and imagination of its young generation" (*ibid.*). It is noticeable that he treated intellectual and professional development in a pragmatic way, as the individual's tool to function effectively in the free-market economic conditions. The liberal concept of *vita activa* gained economic meaning here; in this context one should probably consider the viewpoint of Andrzej Szahaj,

who believed that the Polish transformation discourse was subordinated to the hegemony of neoliberal thinking, and to Polish liberals' conviction that "they had found the answer to all questions and the key to economic bliss" (Szahaj 2014: 148). Szacki noticed, however, that "the hegemony of liberal thinking "was present mainly in the rhetorical sphere; for in practice, Polish liberals, including Bielecki, had to "occasionally refrain from following liberal rules consistently" (Szacki 1994: 194). As it turned out, "the state's intervention is necessary almost every step of the way" (Szacki 1994: 194).

The democratic state—the guardian of the free market

In his policy statement, Bielecki claimed that he "focused on competence while choosing candidates for the government" (*Transcript*: 168). He was convinced that his ministers constituted "a government of qualified specialists, especially in economic matters" (*ibid.*). Again, the economy, and more specifically the knowledge of economic processes, turned out to be the most important factor. In his policy speech, Bielecki did not deal at all with issues connected with the systemic or political transformation. He emphasized, implicitly invoking Lech Wałęsa winning the presidential seat, that "the general presidential election cleared the path to genuine democracy and independence" (*Transcript*: 158). He was aware that only an entirely "free parliamentary election will determine a democratic character of this process" (*ibid.*), but in his policy statement one will not find any references to the vision of the Polish political system. The approval of representative democracy is visible in many parts of Bielecki's policy statement; the Prime Minister treated the very fact of forming the government as an answer to the people's will and as evidence that "we draw conclusions from the society's attitude and will expressed in the presidential election" (*Transcript*: 159). Similarly, Donald Tusk kept silent about these matters in his policy statement titled *Liberals' tasks* (Polish: *Zadania liberalów*). Invoking Isaiah Berlin and Karl Popper, Tusk assumed "moderate liberalism which is far from orthodoxy" (Tusk 1998: 149–150). In addition, Janusz Lewandowski stated that "in times of widespread chaos and discouragement we have a precious gift to give; we propose a clear vision of democratic capitalism" (Lewandowski 1998: 136). These conclusions are pursuant to the ideological declaration of Dariusz Filar, *To be a liberal* (Polish: *Być liberałem*) published in 1988 in *Przegląd Polityczny*, in which the author favoured freedom over equality, the individual over the many, law

over violence, evolution over revolution and property over alienation (Filar 1998: 99–110). Thus, when Bielecki declares that “we are interested in these social changes which strengthen democracy” (160), he does not mean any particular systemic solutions, but rather processes which support and energize the civil society. In this respect Bielecki resembles Berlin or Popper more than Locke, Montesquieu or even John Rawls. Hence, Dzielski ignored the reflection on institutional solutions, indicating that “freedom can only be achieved as a result of decades-long evolution of the entire society” (Dzielski 1989: 19), the first step of which was to build a free-market economy.

Bielecki’s idea of democracy is not based so much on procedural or institutional matters, or changing the state authorities after the general election, but rather on “the society taking their matters into their own hands” (*Transcript*: 158). Here, Bielecki refers more to a civil society than procedural democracy. The reflections on the civil society, similarly to anthropological matters, are subjected to the issue of implementing the principles of the free-market economy. Bielecki warned that during his term, “the practice of building the market in Poland will undergo significant changes; we want as many citizens involved in it as possible” (*Transcript*: 159). He did point out, however, that his programme of building a free-market economy “will be directed mainly at people, their abilities, their faith in the purpose of work and resourcefulness” (*ibid.*). The proposal to decentralize state authority which is mentioned in Bielecki’s policy statement was formulated not only by Gdańsk liberals, but it can also be found in political statements of all Polish liberal groups of the 20th century (Rogaczewska 2011: 198–199; Dzielski 1989: 39–40; Charchuła 2016: 108–109, 128; Szacki 1994: 121–122). Stefan Kisielewski concludes that the main aim would be to create such a legal and institutional framework of a democratic country, so that a large number of citizens would exercise their freedom in the public sphere. (Kisielewski 1998: 343–344). Knowing the condition of Polish society after decades of communism, and seeing the emerging social problems in the transformation era, Bielecki announced that his government would take action to prevent “public apathy in our country, as no one should feel lost or lonely” (*Transcript*: 162). He pointed out that in a democratic state, “it is necessary to establish rules of cooperation and negotiation between the government and trade union organizations, or between employers and employees in a company” (*Transcript*: 161), and “to solve conflicts by getting to the root of the problem” (*ibid.*). Bielecki’s proposals reflect the liberal concept of praising practical skills and human activity. This concept has a long history—Alexis de Tocqueville had praised the United States of America, which in his opinion had become an almost boundless

source of human activity, creativity and work (Tocqueville 1976: 212). Thus, state authorities should “divert the moral and intellectual activity of man to the production of comfort, and to the acquirement of the necessities of life” (Tocqueville 1976: 179), as only in this way can the government “ensure the greatest degree of enjoyment and the least degree of misery to each of the individuals” (Tocqueville 1976: 180). What is supposed to guarantee all of the above is democracy.

Alexis de Tocqueville, as well as Mill, Berlin and Popper, considered choosing a particular form of democracy to be a secondary matter. It was more important, in his view, to protect personal freedom through establishing a specific legal framework, and by keeping the state active at such a level that it would interfere in the individual's life only if absolutely necessary. This view is likened to the model of a minimal state (or a “night-watchman state”), although one should realise that this concept has evolved in the liberal ideology. A minimal state has a different structure in Smith's or Hayek's view. Bielecki seems to approve of a form of a minimal state in his policy statement, too. He states that “the state should be limited in its competences so as not to inhibit personal freedom” (*Transcript*: 164). Szacki unveiled the “minarchist” rhetoric of Polish liberals, who “in order to achieve their liberal objective, time and again, even when they did not encounter political resistance, they had to be untrue to their liberal principles” (Szacki 1994: 194). In practice, as Charchuła points out, Polish liberals are motivated to take certain actions because they are aware that “the state should respond to the needs connected with economic processes” (Charchuła 2016: 212). Bielecki saw it was necessary for the state to cooperate with civic organizations. In his opinion, “the state's social policy, in the area of helping people in need, should be supported by non-governmental initiatives” (*Transcript*: 161). However, as the state's influence on the economy and society is minimized, it is necessary to increase the efficiency of state institutions. This means that if we follow the rule of having “less state in civil life,’ we will need to demand more of civil servants” (*Transcript*: 164–165), and we will also need to “simplify various administrative procedures” (*Transcript*: 165). Public sector activity should be made subject to law; thus, Bielecki indicates that “the growth of democratic freedom in Poland cannot be compromised by the impunity of criminals” (*ibid.*), who may take advantage of the weakness or temporary inefficiency of institutions. Bielecki announced establishing appropriate procedures of “seeking justice in court” (*ibid.*). Contrary to what might have been expected, Bielecki did not deal with issues related to the separation of powers,

the independence of the judiciary or the guarantees offered by the rule of law. Again, it can be confirmed that his project was predominantly concentrated on economic freedom, while the systemic and institutional matters were of secondary importance. On the one hand, Bielecki promised that it was his wish to

... make the new government take actions based on civil liberties. The state built upon civil liberties should be strong in order to protect this freedom and it should have proper tools to defend it. (*Transcript*: 164)

On the other hand civil liberty is interpreted in his policy statement mainly from the perspective of economic liberalism.

The Polish version of economic liberalism—summary

One often reads in the source literature that the formation of Polish liberal democracy in the 1990s, especially building the free-market economy, was an unprecedented process and an imitation of Western liberal ideology. It is also emphasized that the liberalism formed in Poland did not have any indigenous roots or national traditions. Experts drawing these conclusions seem to ignore the fact that in Poland, and in Eastern Europe, “there is exceptional conceptual confusion concerning liberalism” (Szacki 1994: 13). It is not insignificant that “certain tenets of the liberal *credo* are really questioned by no one” (Szacki 1994: 15). Without a doubt, the Polish transformation, and especially its economic aspect with the “shock therapy” of introducing capitalism, was unprecedented; thus, the transformation process, its aims and institutional dimension, must be discussed in the context of the development of Western neoliberalism. This does not mean, however, that local liberal tradition did not exist or was insignificant. Indeed, if we consider, for instance, the Cracovian school of economy, liberalism had marginal meaning; but since the 1980s, liberal thought was present in the discourse of anti-communist opposition, and clandestine liberal publications² became a platform for spreading liberal ideas. In Bielecki’s policy statement we will not find direct references to any movements or liberal groups in Poland or in Europe; even

² Liberalism in its various forms and dimensions was promoted mainly in the following periodicals and publications: *Trzynastka*, *Niepodległość*, *Przegląd Polityczny*, *Kurs*, *Stańczyk*, *Merkuryusz Krakowski i Światowy* (see: Knoch 2015).

Gdańsk liberals who were members of his government, and with whom he was affiliated, are not directly mentioned as representatives of the intellectual foundation of his programme. This does not change the fact that the entire speech delivered on 5 January 1991 is closely connected to reflections and conclusions made by Gdańsk liberals. The main ideas promoted by Gdańsk liberals—property, market, entrepreneurship—dominated Bielecki's policy statement; consequently his project of rebuilding Poland may definitely be discussed within the framework of economic liberalism. The economic sphere prevailed over political and social matters, and economic freedom took precedence over political, civil or personal liberties. There are no systemic or institutional proposals in Bielecki's political statement, which suggests that forming free-market mechanisms was the most important aspect of creating a new political order. This liberal-economic rhetoric was also dominant in the general political discourse at the beginning of the 1990s, at least until the work on the new constitution began.

In practice, however, Bielecki's project had a dimension of a realistic, practical, pragmatic or applied liberalism (Szacki 1994: 194; Biegasiewicz 2011: 71–92; Biegasiewicz 2013: 87; Bielecki 1991: 9). A truly liberal state was only supposed to be a model or an ultimate objective whose fulfilment would be constant and long-term. On the one hand, according to Bielecki, if “the society showed great courage and sacrifice acknowledging the necessity of partial unemployment” (*Transcript*: 161), it is crucial to “produce results desired by the society, albeit through making unpopular decisions” (*Transcript*: 158). Bielecki showed the logic of a political realist, not a doctrinaire blinded by ideology. The awareness that his government would not be “followed by a flood, but by another Polish government” (*Transcript*: 164) tempered aspirations and specific actions taken by liberals in Bielecki's government, to Ackerman's disappointment. The latter believed that it would be possible to carry out a genuine “liberal revolution” in Poland whose ultimate result would be a truly revolutionary liberal constitution (Ackerman 1996: 61). Although critics frequently point out mistakes and shortcomings of the first years of transformation, especially the considerable social costs of liberal reforms, it cannot be denied that after 1989 the neoliberal project was the only idea which gained sufficient support among Polish political elites and international agents who had considerable influence on the final outcome of Polish transformation. Moreover, it was a relatively coherent and reliable project, especially if we take into consideration international affairs and the state of the global economy at that time. The proposal, although it was indeed focused on economic matters,

was quite firmly rooted in the liberal ideology adopted by Locke and Mill, Berlin, Popper and Hayek. Hence, there is no doubt that Bielecki's policy statement should be interpreted in this context.

Translated by: Paulina Jeziorska

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Sławomir Drellich

The Polish Liberal Project in Jan Krzysztof Bielecki's Policy Statement

Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to present the liberal project suggested in Jan Krzysztof Bielecki's policy statement delivered on 5 January 1991. According to the author, the project exemplifies economic liberalism; whereas its anthropological aspects, as well as the strictly political and social problems, occupy but a secondary place in comparison with economic issues. The author shows that Bielecki's project is a continuation of the classical liberal economic ideas and an attempt to implement 20th century Western ideas (called neoliberalism).

Keywords: liberalism, neoliberalism, Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, the Gdańsk liberals.