Editorial
"Cold War": Political Reflection
in the Period between 1945 and 1990

World War II brought a hecatomb to the world both on an unprecedented scale and with the use of unprecedented methods and technologies. According to estimates, between 70 and 85 million people died as a result of hostilities, more than 60% of whom were civilians. The world became a place of unheard-of crimes and persecution on the basis of one's ethnicity, political leanings, religion, sexual orientation and inborn cognitive and physical disabilities, culminating in the genocide of Jews, Roma, Slavs, Chinese (beginning with the Nanking Massacre in 1937) and members of other nations. The genocide perpetrated during the Second World War (especially that committed by the Third Reich) was usually characterized by meticulous (socioeconomic, logistic and legal) planning on an industrial scale, combined with the development of the techniques and technology used to commit the murders. This unspeakable tragedy culminated in the use of two atomic bombs in the attack on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As a result, around 200,000 people died, two cities were destroyed, and hundreds of thousands of people – both from the generation that lived through the attack and from subsequent generations – would be affected by the ensuing radiation.

World War II also brought enormous material damage, especially in Europe and the Far East. Entire cities were left in ruins, their transport and industrial infrastructures destroyed. The process of rebuilding the European economy would be one of the key challenges facing the countries of the Old Continent. One of the most important consequences of the hostilities was a far-reaching change in the structure of the international order. Two states, whose influence on the defeat of the Axis powers was decisive – the United States and the Soviet Union, clearly advanced to the rank of superpowers. Soon,

both states would transform from allies into the main opponents in the arena of international politics.

Even during the war, the Allies began building a system that would prevent a repeat of the hell that was World War II in the future. At a conference in San Francisco that commenced in April 1945, a decision was made to establish a new international organization – the United Nations. For an instant, it was possible to believe that state governments, mindful of the open wounds left from the most terrible armed conflict in human history, would begin building a safer and more just order. One of the first documents adopted by the General Assembly was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of December 10, 1948. The vote on it had already revealed a crack among the victorious Allies. Six countries of the emerging communist bloc (as well as Saudi Arabia and South Africa) abstained from voting – this was a result of the ever-growing conflict between Washington and Moscow, which had been on the rise since 1946 (as a rule, the famous "Long Telegram" by George Kennan is referred to as a kind of breakthrough in the American perception of USSR). The world entered the period known as the "Cold War" (1947-1991) – a time of unrelenting rivalry between two superpowers, a rivalry encompassing many spheres – political, economic, military, scientific, philosophical, ideological and cultural. The clash of these two basic paradigms of how to perceive man and political power, each representing one of the political and military blocs, resulted in a deepening of the reflection on issues such as individual freedom, human rights, the legitimacy of political power, and world peace. Against the backdrop of the "Cold War" began the process of European integration, the ideological foundation of which was rooted in European social-democratic and Christian-democratic thought. In the political and economic sphere, the key issues for European integration were relations with the United States and the 'German Question,' especially Franco-German relations. This latest volume of Horyzonty Polityki is meant to serve as a contribution to research on selected issues of the "Cold War" period.

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