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## Editorial

# The legitimation of power and contemporary democracy

After the Second World War, the world of democratic states appeared to be the most stable socio-political construct developed throughout human history. It was considered unquestionable that after centuries of experimenting with various political systems, particularly in the light of the tragic and never-before-seen events of the first half of the 20th century and the enslavement of some parts of Europe during the Cold War, it would be impossible to turn away from democratic political systems as the only acceptable form of the legitimation of political power. However, over the last several years, and – to a lesser extent over the last decade or two – authoritarian tendencies have become increasingly evident, both among citizens, politicians, and political scientists. What is more, these authoritarian tendencies cannot be explained solely or even primarily by the populism of various political camps or by the propaganda of reactionary circles, although such exploratory tendencies are present in socio-political discourse. Undoubtedly, the problem (can we already speak of a crisis?) related to the functioning of democratic systems in the contemporary world is real. Participants of the global public debate increasingly point to the widening chasm between the political elites and the realities of social life, there being no real means of changing these elites. Thus, some people point to a phenomenon whereby democratic procedures become merely a confirmation of the behind-the-scenes decisions made by the political elites, i.e. their more or less formal confirmation. This is supposedly indicative of a tendency for modern democratic systems to gradually transform into oligarchic systems. Others argue for an opposite tendency and claim that democracy in its current version (this primarily refers to the United States) is becoming a demagogic-populist institution and healing it requires

strengthening the role played by the financial and intellectual elites. Moreover, old problems resurface in new variants – these include such issues as democratic power versus authority and the relationship between democracy and morality/ethics. Will democracy survive this crisis and scathing attacks on its legitimating function? Will it have to, at least partially, give way to anti-democratic forces? Or will it emerge from this crisis, aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, transformed but stronger? This issue of the *Horizons of Politics* attempts to address some of the above-mentioned issues related to the legitimation of power in the contemporary world.

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