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Editorial: Transformations of the world order

In what direction are today's transformations of the world order heading? When we posed this question in the *Call for Papers* for the present thematic issue, we wrote:

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has challenged the existing world order. The authoritarian governments in Moscow and Beijing are striving to establish an international order that recognises regional hegemons and their spheres of influence. The war in Europe has reminded us of the significance of military power in international relations, yet today's global conflicts are also ideological and political battles: democracy versus autocracy, universal human rights versus a plurality of civilizations and diversity of traditions.

Current shifts in world politics are described with many different concepts. Commentators speak of the twilight of the liberal international order, the breakdown of rules-based international order, the rise of a multipolar world, and a renewed super-power rivalry. The dichotomy "democracies versus autocracies" competes with the notion of systemic rivalry, which denotes competition between actors who defend an order grounded in international law, the UN Charter, and universal human rights, and powers such as Russia and China, which demand recognition of their spheres of influence and view the liberal idea of human rights as a tool for meddling in domestic affairs. The term "systemic rivalry" can seem very abstract, axiologically neutral, and therefore not particularly inspirational. By contrast, pitting democracy against authoritarianism is highly value-laden and thus often instrumentalised in domestic politics, especially against a backdrop of sharp political polarisation.

The thematic articles in this issue span a broad spectrum of topics, including European Union policies, regional cooperation in Central Europe, and the command structure of Poland's Armed Forces. They also discuss contemporary democracy, its Christian roots, and the current crisis of liberal democracy. The greatest attention is devoted to the European Union and its role on the world stage: individual contributions analyse the Union's trade, security and climate policies, which, importantly, are pursued in an environment marked by the tensions, crises and uncertainties of an evolving global order.

We also invite Readers to explore the engaging articles in the "Varia" section and the reviews of the next two volumes in the "Social Dictionaries" series.

Krzysztof C. Matuszek
theme issue editor