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Editorial: The contemporary *res publica*

The selected thematic focus of the 16th issue (no. 57) of *Horizons of Politics* – “The contemporary *res publica*” – provides an interpretive framework for a diverse collection of articles that reflect on the condition, boundaries, and mechanisms of the political community. The authors brought together in this volume analyse the political community in a multidimensional manner: from its philosophical foundations, through the institutional and behavioural determinants of decision-making processes, to the challenges posed by technological transformation, shifting power configurations in international politics, and evolving models of leadership.

The point of departure for this reflection is a diagnosis of contemporary tensions inherent in the functioning of liberal democracy. At the beginning of the 21st century, there was widespread hope that democracy as a socio-political construct was no longer under serious threat, based on the belief that the experiences of the 20th century had closed off the path to authoritarianism. In recent years, however, this confidence has been significantly undermined. An increasingly visible return of polarising narratives has accelerated the crisis of public institutions. These phenomena cannot be explained solely by reference to populism; rather, they point to deeper structural problems within contemporary democratic systems.

At the centre of this diagnosis lies the issue of a growing distance between political elites and citizens. In this context, democratic procedures are often perceived as formal ratifications of decisions made outside the sphere of transparent deliberation, lending support to arguments about the gradual oligarchisation of democracy. At the same time, opposing positions are articulated, emphasising the risk of demagogisation of the decision-making process and calling for a strengthening of the role of

elites as a condition for systemic stability. These debates revive classic dilemmas of political theory: the relationship between democracy and authority, the tension between *vox populi* and the competence of those who govern, and the question of the normative relationship between democracy and the ethics of public life.

Against this backdrop, particular importance is accorded to contributions devoted to the ideological and historical foundations of the *res publica*. Analyses of the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, transformations of European civilizational identity, and the Polish constitutional tradition of the 20th century demonstrate that contemporary forms of political community are deeply rooted in long-term cultural and institutional processes. These are complemented by reflections on natural-law decisionism and by deconstructions of political myths, which expose the fragility of the foundations of political order in critical or exceptional circumstances.

Another vital dimension of this issue of *Horizons of Politics* consists of analyses addressing the effectiveness of state action and public policy. Articles devoted to behavioural approaches, mechanisms of evidence-based policy, fiscal policy, and crisis management raise questions about the limits of technocratic rationalisation of power and its relationship to citizens' autonomy. Issues of strategic governance, public information, and sectoral policies – from housing to healthcare – highlight the practical dimension of the legitimacy of public decision-making.

The volume is rounded out by analyses of 21st-century challenges related to digital transformation and geopolitics. Issues such as deplatforming, the impact of technology on supply chains, migration, security, and transformations of political systems beyond Europe indicate that the contemporary *res publica* operates under conditions of increasing interdependence and uncertainty.

We hope that this volume will serve not only as a survey of current research but also as an invitation to deeper reflection on what the common good means today: whether it should be understood as the sum of individual preferences, the outcome of efficient management of human capital, or rather as a community of values and historical memory within a changing political order.

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theme issue editor