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FOREWORD

As an introduction to a monograph of this type, it is a cliché to note the timeliness of the choice of topic and of the publication itself. Still, let me start with this: both the choice of topic and the timing are spot on! The second, and now the third decade of the 21st century is characterised by the constant movement and transformation of the international world order. The apparent stability of the bipolar world order after the Second World War, and of American and liberal dominance after the break-up of the Soviet Union, was followed by economic, political and military unpredictability, and by the geopolitical instability generated by conflicts between regional or even national frameworks.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has finally sobered the Western world from the false illusion of the 'end of history'. On 24 February 2022, Europe woke up to the inexorable end of a period of peace that had dominated the continent for three decades, and was faced with a situation for which it had no ready answers in its thirty years of peacetime toolbox. A new world order is being born before our eyes, but this process did not actually begin when the first Russian tank crossed the Ukrainian border. In addition to the changing dynamics of international power relations, the world's climate related and demographic problems, the culture war sweeping the Western world, and the negative economic and social effects of the pandemic, the unprecedented military offensive in Europe since the Second World War is another turning point in the construction of the world order to come. This world order, with its unique and evolving ordering principles and relations, also brings a new geopolitical reality, which requires a new interpretative framework in parallel with the revision of the basic theses established in previous years and decades.

Until 24 February 2022, it may have been true that our world was more characterised by multi-player rivalries than at any time since the Second World War. But Russia's brutal aggression against Ukraine has fundamentally shaken the Eurasian geopolitical system. Russia's war and the Western response to it are also fundamentally changing the functioning of the international economic system and its integration mechanisms. The global energy system, which has been stable despite the market volatility of recent decades, has been turned upside down. Europe's now unstoppable substantial disengagement from the Russian energy sector is rewriting the rules and bringing with it new trade and infrastructural cooperation, financing and development needs. The economic and financial sanctions against Russia also fundamentally affect the existing system of global economic integration.

Now, a year after the outbreak of the war, it is still too early to see what losses Ukraine will suffer and how much territory Russia will eventually be able to gain or retain. But it is clear that Russia will not be able to invade the country, will not be able to replace the government with a pro-Russian puppet regime, and will certainly not be able to 'denazify' Ukraine. In this sense, it cannot win its war against Ukraine and the Western alliance: the sanctions imposed on Russia through its own fault and the Western policies will force Russia's economy back into the 20th century. China and India – while not confronting Moscow, and even seeking cooperation with it on many points – are not risking their trade, financial and strategic relations by helping Russia. At the same time, in parallel with the formation of blocs once again, the world continues to move inexorably along the path of deglobalisation, where value chains are reorganised and states increasingly protect their economies, resulting in a world where the often conflicting elements of globalisation, bloc-formation and deglobalisation are simultaneously affecting geopolitical conditions. We see clear signs of this, for example, in the intensifying U.S.–China, U.S.–Europe and EU–China competition and related trade and protectionist conflicts.

Compared to Russia's original intentions and ambitions, Ukraine will emerge politically and morally victorious: even if it loses territory, it has won the sympathy of the developed world, its economy will be rebuilt by

EU and U.S. companies, and it will become a military great power in the region in the medium term with the influx of mainly U.S., British, German and French military equipment and advanced technology. In fact, Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration is inevitable.

The U.S. is building a military and political presence in the central and eastern parts of Europe that has been unparalleled in recent decades. This results in an increase in Washington's national security, political and economic leverage and activity. Thus, not only the friendly relationship with Russia, but also the friendly relationship with China is under increased pressure as a result of the Washington–Beijing conflict and 'decoupling'. Moreover, America's presence in Europe and its military support for Ukraine, as well as the containment of Chinese influence in the Eurasian world, unquestionably enjoy the support of a majority of both U.S. parties. The two main pillars of the U.S. presence in Central and Eastern Europe will be Poland and Ukraine, supported by Romania and the Baltic States. Warsaw is building Europe's strongest army as NATO's eastern bastion, while its role as an economic and energy hub is already visible. The Polish–American alliance could even replace centuries of German and Russian dominance in Central and Eastern Europe.

The legacy institutional system that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet empire is crumbling, regardless of the war launched by the Russians; digitalisation, social media, the Internet of Things are transforming not only interpersonal relations but also our international economic and political systems, marginalising or even invalidating legacy institutions, procedures and expectations. The emergence of AI-based processes and solutions, the construction of cyberspace gives new meaning to categories such as sovereignty, warfare, economic cooperation, supply chain. As this monograph makes clear, the interpretation and practice of cooperation–competition–rivalry, and the relationship between nation state sovereignty and the organisations that bring nations together, have become much more of a moving target and consequently a source of uncertainty and instability than in the previous 70 years.

The creation of spheres of interest and influence generates serious debate in academic, business and political circles. The protagonists, the interactions

between them and the power relations and developments that determine the outcomes of these interactions are variables in complex formulas, but ultimately all movements are the result of clearly articulated power considerations of the actors. They are never static, they must always adapt to the power dynamics around them. The constant interaction of power considerations and realities is the driving force behind the often turbulent movement of international politics, whose geographic and thematic framework is fundamentally determined by geopolitics. Although the main actors in geopolitical competition are primarily the great powers, including corporate empires that are often more powerful than states (such as Silicon Valley or the Chinese tech giants), still, geopolitical competition affects everyone, and sometimes even smaller players can play their part. One of the essential features of today's collision courses is that geopolitical movements have moved beyond the traditional political–military–economic framework, and technologies and the social, economic and business processes that build on them or result from them, and their implementers, have become actors themselves. Just think of the social media backdrop of the Arab Spring and the geopolitical consequences of the uprisings and civil wars that have engulfed the Middle East, such as migration crises or energy market volatility.

In the post-bipolar era, the United States of America and American liberal democracy – as the single dominant force in the international order – gave impetus and direction to the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Central European states, which are inherently part of the West. The political, privatisation, economic and, consequently, social transformations in the region have affected primarily the internal structures of the countries concerned. After NATO and then EU accession, the broader context, in other words the political and economic interests and positions of the historically dominant powers in Central and Eastern Europe, did not change significantly, although they fluctuated. But this was rewritten and overwritten by the processes set in motion by the Russian aggression. Russia's isolation and China's cautious manoeuvring as a great power have shown that the so-called illiberal political system has no power to organise international communities and cannot be used as a geopolitical strategy. Furthermore, it can be stated that there is no real alternative to the system of military, diplomatic and economic-financial

institutions built around liberal democracies. Moreover, the initiatives (e.g. One Belt, One Road; Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) that challenge this Western institutional system are explicitly stigmatised in the eyes of the West. One of the most important consequences of the geopolitical changes we are witnessing is that the geopolitical latitude for smaller states, including even larger European countries such as Germany and the U.K., is shrinking dramatically.

While recognising the natural attraction of European integration and all its benefits and values, it is also a fact that power interests penetrate even institutionalised relations (transnational 'deep state'). Central and Eastern European leaders must be aware that, as our region has not only remained a theatre of geopolitical competition but has also become a war zone, every national movement can at the same time also be detrimental to the interests of a great power.

Geopolitics is therefore not only about the movements of the 'big', but also about the need for the 'small' (smaller) states to move, and even more so about the efforts of many small states, including Hungary (post-2010), to create their own geopolitically meaningful room for manoeuvre for themselves. The intensity and uncertainty of the implementation of this effort is dramatically increased by the storms and shocks that have pervaded the international system as a whole, among which Hungary has had to face the consequences of the 2008 financial and economic recession, the 2015 migration crisis, the long and devastating Covid period and now the Russian aggression in Europe. It is in this environment that the Hungarian political-economic and business elite must find answers to such crucial questions as the country's competitiveness, its demographic situation, the systemic protection of historic European values and our membership of the Western world – to mention just four key, very complex and crucial aspects for future generations.