



Speech of Woo Won-shik
Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of South Korea
Seoul, South Korea - 16 July 2025

Nice to meet you, everyone. My name is Woo Won-shik, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of South Korea.

The 28th IPSA World Congress of Political Science, held over the past five days in Seoul, has successfully come to a close. My heartfelt congratulations on this remarkable achievement.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and respect to President Pablo Oñate, the members of the 2025 Local Organizing Committee, and everyone who worked tirelessly to make this event a success.

I also extend my warmest congratulations to Professor Yuko Kasuya, the newly elected IPSA President, who will lead IPSA into the future.

The theme of this year's World Congress is *Resisting Autocratization in Polarized Societies*. As I understand, the theme was chosen, and Korea was selected as the host several years ago. I cannot help but think that there was a clear intention behind this choice to seek ways to overcome the global trend of democratic backsliding from the point of South Korea, widely regarded as an exemplary case among so-called new democracies.

And yet, while you were preparing for this World Congress, an unexpected and shocking event unfolded in Korea. The President declared a state of emergency and imposed martial law. This was an extreme manifestation of autocratization, known in political science as a self-coup.

However, the truly remarkable scene began from that moment on. Immediately, countless citizens gathered in front of the National Assembly, and I convened the plenary session together with all the other legislators, to pass a resolution demanding the lifting of martial law. It happened just 2.5 hours after the emergency decree was announced.

When I was elected Speaker of the National Assembly on June 5th, last year, I told my fellow lawmakers that we must go beyond the walls of the Assembly and return to the people, not to the left or the right, but to the people. And just six months later, I found myself climbing over the National Assembly wall in the middle of the night to reopen the National Assembly.

So, even though the direction was opposite, I had to climb the wall. So, if my speech became a prophecy, had I known, I may have chosen my words more carefully.

And ten days later, the National Assembly passed an impeachment motion against the President, thereby suspending the President from office. Four months later, the Constitutional Court unanimously ruled in favor of the impeachment, officially removing the President from power.

And as you can see today, a new administration has taken office in Korea. This entire process unfolded in accordance with constitutional procedures and was made possible through the active participation and support of the Korean people.

When martial law was declared in Korea, I imagine many members of the Local Organizing Committee may have wondered whether the scheduled event could still take place as planned. But in overcoming this political crisis, Koreans demonstrated extraordinary democratic resilience.

Just as the state once rose above colonial rule, national division, the Korean War, and dictatorship to achieve both economic and democratic progress, and just as the state overcame the global financial crisis and the pandemic, this moment again proved what many have said: Koreans carry a crisis resilience DNA.

So, that the World Congress of Political Science held in Korea immediately after such events is in itself a truly historic moment. It feels as though Korea sought to offer the global political science community a real-world case study of how democracy can come under threat and how citizens can rise to overcome it.

So, in a way, it is reminiscent of how a musical born in Korea's Daehangno theater district made its way to Broadway and swept six Tony Awards. The title of the musical is *Maybe a Happy Ending*. Over the past winter, my fellow citizens and I endured great pain and hardship. But perhaps, just perhaps, the ending to our story might be a happy one.

Still, over the past winter, my fellow citizens and I endured great pain and hardship. But perhaps the ending to our story might be a happy one. And still, based on what I have experienced and practiced, however, I believe a more fitting title for democracy is *Never Ending Story*. Democracy is not something completed through a single moment of democratization. It must be continuously nurtured, defended, and deepened. A process of democratizing democracy, which Korea has gone through, speaks powerfully to that truth.

There will be many hardships and challenges ahead for democracy, but as long as we do not give up our aspirations and hopes for democracy, we will surely come to see a better, stronger democracy take shape.

I hope that this academic exchange, held in Korea, a site of democratic crisis and the remarkable overcoming, will serve as a meaningful milestone in your intellectual journey.

May the discipline of political science continue to contribute ever more deeply to humanity's peace, prosperity, and the advancement of democracy.

Thank you.