

Changing Geopolitical Dynamics : How can Hungary and South Korea Navigate Stormy Waters?

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Ambassador Hong's Lecture on Changing Geopolitical Dynamics: How Can Hungary and South Korea Navigate Stormy Waters?

We are living through one of the most dangerous and uncertain periods since the end of the Cold War. According to the latest comprehensive data, 65 state-based armed conflicts occurred across 35 countries in 2025—the highest number recorded since the records began in 1946. Unfortunately, the wars in Ukraine and Iran have continued, causing immense human suffering and economic destruction while presenting the international community with enormous challenges.

Yet geopolitical crises do more than create dangers. They also transform the strategic environment and generate new opportunities for countries that are prepared to adapt. What are these opportunities, and how can we turn them into practical outcomes?

This lecture will examine how South Korea has responded to these crises through a two-track strategy. First, South Korea seeks to become an increasingly indispensable ally of the United States by contributing more actively to shared security, technological development, and industrial capacity. Second, it aims to become a more influential strategic partner for Europe by building trust and establishing durable partnerships with European governments and societies.

South Korea now recognizes that it must both diversify and deepen its relationships. It is therefore expanding its engagement with members of the European Union and NATO, countries of the Global South, and emerging partners in Mongolia, Africa, and the Middle East. President Lee Jae-myung's diplomacy reflects this broader effort to strengthen existing alliances while building new networks of cooperation.

As Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney argued at the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2026, the old international order is not returning, and middle powers must cooperate more actively to defend their interests and values. Countries such as Canada, South Korea, and Hungary can no longer rely solely on the assumptions and institutions of the previous international order. They must strengthen their own capabilities, diversify their partnerships, and cooperate wherever their interests converge.

South Korea is therefore working to enhance its technological capabilities and competitiveness. The United States and South Korea have identified advanced semiconductors, shipbuilding, and naval maintenance as important areas of bilateral cooperation. This includes maintenance, repair, and overhaul, or MRO, services for vessels of the United States Navy, as well as Korean investment in the modernization of the American shipbuilding industry.

South Korea can also help NATO members strengthen their armed forces and domestic defense-industrial capacity. Korean companies already supply advanced defense systems to several European countries. A Korean consortium is also participating in the construction of new nuclear reactors at the Dukovany site in Czechia. These initiatives demonstrate that South Korea can contribute not only to European security but also to Europe's energy security and industrial resilience.

Hungary possesses a strong tradition of scientific achievement and a highly qualified community of scientists, engineers, and technical specialists. Scientific cooperation connecting Nobel laureate Ferenc Krausz and the Max Planck research network with POSTECH illustrates the possibilities created by international academic collaboration. We hope that exchanges of this kind will continue and expand in the future.

South Korea experienced a change of government in 2025, while Hungary underwent a historic political transition in 2026. Despite differences in the political circumstances of the two countries, both societies have demonstrated the importance of constitutional processes, public participation, strong institutions, and the peaceful transfer of political authority.

Political turbulence does not eliminate democracy's capacity for resilience. Nevertheless, both countries must continue working to strengthen their institutions and navigate the considerable challenges ahead. I believe that Hungary and South Korea share important experiences and that there is much we can learn from one another.

In this lecture, I will identify the principal global risks facing South Korea and explain how the government of President Lee Jae-myung has responded to multiple crises. I will also consider how Hungary and South Korea can support each other in areas of shared interest.

Education, science, and technology offer particularly promising opportunities. Since diplomatic relations were established in 1989, South Korean companies have become major investors in Hungary. South Korea remains committed to developing a stable,

mutually beneficial, and long-term economic relationship with Hungary.

It is my sincere hope that more Hungarian students, professors, artists, scientists, and researchers will visit Korea. I warmly invite you to experience Korea's dynamic culture, rich history, technological achievements, and welcoming people.

I will do my best to help create greater opportunities for study, research, scientific cooperation, and cultural exchange. I also hope that you will play an active role in connecting our two societies and building an even stronger partnership between Hungary and South Korea.