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South Korea

The South Korean crisis seen from France

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The imposition of martial law by President Yoon Suk Yeol on December 3 was quickly defeated. This is good news, but not only that.

The reasons that led President Yoon to initiate a very poorly prepared putsch remain obscure (like Emmanuel Macron's decision to dissolve the National Assembly in a very unfavourable situation).

Mobilization against illegal acts

The bad news is that the army (or a fraction of the general staff) started by supporting the president, even though he was acting illegally (the Constitution requires the agreement of Parliament). Special forces with considerable resources (armoured vehicles, helicopters) were to invade Parliament and arrest opposition leaders. The number of soldiers involved in the operation was limited, which explains why, faced with an unforeseen situation, they were overwhelmed.

The good news is that this attempted coup was thwarted in record time thanks to the fierce resistance of civil servants and opposition personnel on the terrain, as well as a massive citizen mobilization that came to their aid in the middle of the night, bringing together different generations, many young people, activists and trade unionists. This allowed 190 elected representatives to enter Parliament and repeal martial law, with the support of a small number of members of the government party.

The springs of this mobilization show the liveliness of South Korean democracy, where the memory of the times of dictatorship has not been dissipated. The intervention of the army shows that its stability is not as assured as it might have seemed (martial law had not been imposed since 1979). The mobilizations continue today, for the resignation or dismissal of President Yoon. The president refuses, but the mobilizations can last for days, weeks, or even months, as was the case in the past.

Economic crisis, budget cuts and government corruption

Why is this crisis occurring now? South Korea has long experienced rapid development, thanks to an interventionist state policy, favouring the formation of conglomerates, which Japan and the United States have both tolerated and integrated, for geopolitical reasons in particular: the division of the Korean peninsula, the proximity of China and Russia. It now massively exports electronics, and is the second largest producer of semiconductors (in particular printed memory storage circuits →). However, after the Covid crisis and in a less buoyant global market, growth is running out of steam. The economic situation of the population is deteriorating, as is the quality of public services. The presidential couple is credited with numerous cases of corruption. The political crisis erupted when Parliament was due to reduce the budget that President Yoon can use at his discretion, in the name of national security.

In short, South Korea is facing a situation that, beyond its specificities, is not foreign to that of many Western countries. It has something to tell us, particularly in France where the army occupies a major place at the heart of our regime, where Macron and those around him (among others) show very little respect for parliamentary institution or

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the results of elections. We must not take an "exotic" view of this Far Eastern country. Its turbulence should be a warning to us .

14 December 2024.

Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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