

Radio Interview: Daniel Herman, the Honorary Consul of Liechtenstein in the Czech Republic

Daniel Herman was a guest of the programme Hovory (Talks) - a personality based interview on Český rozhlas Plus, a public radio broadcasting.

M – Our today's guest believes in fate, in the superterrestrial logic in our earthly paths. He believes that if a man is open to God, he himself and the world, he arrives at the right places. His life path is interesting and he must have often asked questions about its meaning. Daniel Herman, the Honorary Consul of the Principality of Liechtenstein. More will follow. Eva Hůlková says hello from behind the microphone. Mr. Herman, thank you for coming. Welcome.

DH - Thank you for inviting me.

M - Your themes. When I look at you: church life, human rights, crimes of Nazism and Communism, Roma themes, dealing with own past. And now the Liechtenstein consulate - what is the logic you see in all this and what do you feel as your own principles and values?

DH - I see it as the continuity of my life, because basically all my life, since the time I got any wiser, I have devoted my time to some form of dealing with my own past, no matter if it was the history of my own family that, as partly Jewish, was severely hit by National Socialism, and later by Communism, which I have myself experienced. I was 26 when the regime fell, so these things have been sort of accompanying me. And the elements you've mentioned, in the spiritual field, service for the church, service for the community and now service, let's say in the international relations, they have much in common. For example, my service in the field of culture, exactly there I had indeed a big opportunity to deal with the national heritage care, as monuments are silent witnesses of ancient, and sometimes even less ancient, times which accompany us and which also speak to us. And when we get to what you've said, what you've listed in your overview, then the Liechtenstein heritage is huge because it includes roughly eight common centuries of history and, of course, there is this spiritual element, because if I remember well, about 40% of the national heritage fund in this country is of sacred character. And therefore it is closely related. It means that this field of the heritage care, culture and dealing with the past, a kind of remembrance culture, it is simply the theme of my life.

M - When you look back; this question sounds strange. Firstly because of your age which is not very high, secondly because we have just begun this interview. Nevertheless, when you look back at these life stages, is there anything you are especially proud of and anything you are sorry for or you feel as not completely OK?

DH - I especially appreciate that I've had the honour to collaborate with some people which I held in high esteem. Among others, I would like to mention Cardinal Miloslav Vlk and Professor Jan Švejnar. Of course, even in the field of politics, I have met many people I truly respect. And currently, I very much appreciate that I was asked for cooperation by his Serenity Prince of Liechtenstein. And it is something which really resonates, 100%, with my opinions, with my life. So, I am so lucky and I am grateful for that. Of course, there are certain stages in my professional life which are not the happiest. For example, when I worked as the head of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes for three years, in 2010-13. I would compare it to a permanent movement on a war front. There were indeed many conflict themes. It was not that one would try to escape from them, it is necessary to deal with them, but I personally believe I am not a conflict man and I prefer calmer waters.

M - When we have touched this dealing with the past, which you mentioned in an interview as a theme which interests you permanently. Do you believe that we, Czechs, feel it differently, that we simply cannot deal with the past? I am not imposing it on you. I'm simply asking.

DH - No, I do not think so. When we look around Europe, or not only around Europe, we can also browse in other parts of the world, then the process of dealing and coping with the past is always complicated. When we have mentioned other parts of the world, let's have a look at the United States. The question of racism. Let's look at Australia. The question of the Aborigines. Let's have a look in Europe, at the Netherlands, where they deal with the colonial heritage in terms of the symbols used on royal flags. And we can probably find something in every country. On the contrary, I think that in this country, for example in terms of dealing with the Communist past, that we were even further than some other countries which also had to deal with these issues. Because the existence of already mentioned Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and the Act on Illegality of the Communist Regime, or even the Lustration Act, they were all some purifying mechanisms which were meant to help the society deal with these issues.

M - Excuse me, but don't you think that the Act on Illegality of the Communist Regime is a bit forgotten?

DH - Well, it is part of our legal system. It is possible to refer to it, however, there are no sanctions in it.

M - More or less, it is a declaratory issue, but it was created very shortly after the fall of totality, wasn't it?

DH - However, it is important that it is part of our legal system, so I believe we have in our past older and less older heroes we can be rightfully proud of. And, also, persons about which we cannot say the same. But it is same as anywhere else. The process is always complicated but if the society does not undergo it, the unhealed guilt remains rambling in the society, re-infecting it again and again like an untreated disease. We have finally arrived at such a strange comparison which fits. Seriously, it does.

M - And another, more personal, matter, because it has been quite a long time since you left priesthood. I remember that at that time it was, I don't want to say a scandal, but it was something people were not used to. And then they waited what would happen, how it would happen. And you simply showed it was possible that it was nothing which would somehow scandalize the person, that it is simply possible to find a different way and keep the credit which was connected to you because you are respected even by the church representatives. Is it a kind of precedent in our modern history, what do you think?

DH - I have already mentioned here one amazing man with whom, I had the honour, to work, Cardinal Miloslav Vlk. And, also, thanks to our very friendly relations, we had the opportunity to speak about these things and I have to say that he helped me a lot in this whole process.

M - Although he did not approve it at the very beginning. And that is the human in it, I would say. It shows his greatness.

DH - Yes, his human dimension. Of course, it is always difficult, but I must say it was he who told me, some 20 years ago, for the first time whether I did not want to run as a candidate somewhere? I do not say that he implanted the idea in my mind, but it is true that since that time I started to think about it. And because he still was my main advisor. And when I was challenged to enter the active politics and I came to him asking for his opinion. He told me at that time that if I had the opportunity, I should not think about it and take it. When I was at the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes, he was immediately ready to join the scientific board and he accompanied me with his blessing hand actually for my whole professional life, which I appreciate a lot. And you know, for sure. I asked to be released from priesthood but on the other hand I still feel the mission and I try, at least as I understand it, to perform it and continue in that direction because I am convinced that without the vertical dimension of life, a life is simply not full. And it is true that I've met during various moments of my engagements people who are less open or unopen to classic forms of spiritual service, but they

have interest, they are open and, if I may say, one of my religious experiences is that a spirit blows wherever it wants and we often meet its manifestations in places where you absolutely would not expect it. And this is amazing. And fascinating.

M - It's true. As you've mentioned, the blessing hand of Miloslav Vlk, do you miss him a lot?

DH - Yes, that's true, that since the time he left this world I have not met a man of this closeness to me, with whom I could really discuss some fundamental issues. Yes, I miss him.

M - When we look at your work of the Honorary Consul. Well, a honorary consul in general, a layperson sees it as a dream job, such a classy diplomatic post, but I would say that the relations of the Czech Republic and Liechtenstein are centuries-long but still there are some conflicts and that it is not super easy and that if your task is to build good relations between these two countries and if you want to move it somewhere, I would say, it will need a big devotion on your part.

DH - Just to put it into some legal context, consular offices are provided by the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations from 1963. The Convention was adopted in this country in 1968 and it specifies the performance of consular functions and the head of a consular office is accepted for the performance of his or her function based on the consent of the receiving country, which is called *exequatur*. It means that I am a citizen of the Czech Republic but in my case the sending country is the Principality of Liechtenstein and the receiving country is the Czech Republic which had to issue this *exequatur* and agree with my appointment. As far as the content itself is concerned, yes, you've mentioned it is especially in the field of strengthening the bonds between both the countries. And these bonds are numerous, in the field of culture but also in the field of educational exchange, in the field of economy, it must be also stressed because there are many Liechtenstein companies which operate in this country. The most famous is Hilti, dealing with fastening technologies and many others. It is important thing that these things have also a dimension not only in the field of culture, which is however accented for me.

M - Yes, yes, I understand it all, however I haven't yet got the answer to my question what "Herman-style" you would like to put into it, if it is possible at all, and if you are simply not tied by some diplomatic rules and traditions.

DH - Thanks to the fact that I have dedicated a lot of time to the field of cultural heritage and monuments, I met the Liechtenstein heritage intensively because the most famous area is the Lednice-Valtice Complex in South Moravia, part of the UNESCO World Heritage. And there I have learnt how huge traces the cultural heritage left here. So, when I spoke to the Liechtenstein Ambassador who resides in Vienna, where also the Embassy for the Czech Republic is seated, which is my direct superior body, so we mainly spoke about the field of cultural diplomacy, this is a kind of accent in my activities. And, of course, to know all the historical details, to know all moments which accompanied our mutual relations, some simple, some more difficult and to realize what, for example, I admire in Liechtenstein, this continuous history without any twists, turns and revolutions. This is something fascinating. So, I try to describe these things more even to the Czech public, for example within my engagement in the Czech-Liechtenstein Society, where I am a member of the Board, and in various activities like lectures and exhibitions. Of course, these covid times do not support this much, nevertheless these are all things which are reflected in my work.

M - You are listening to Czech Radio Plus. The guest of today's Talks is Daniel Herman, the Honorary Consul of Liechtenstein in the Czech Republic. You are listening to timeless talks with unusual people, premiered every day after 10 pm on Radio Plus. I've read, and you may correct me, that already in 1249 the King Ottokar II of Bohemia invited the Liechtensteins to South Moravia, which developed into centuries-long intensive engagements in all different fields you have already mentioned here. Also, the castles of Bučovice, Plumlov, Velké Losiny and others belong to the family. Now the family lost two thirds of their land in the inter-war land reform and the remaining properties were confiscated based on the post-war Decrees of President Beneš. How

did the 20th century history mark the history of the Liechtensteins in Czechia and what does it mean for the presence when, as you say, it is necessary to develop the relations and so on.

DH - There are not many families which would be so closely connected with the Czech lands for such a long time. You've mentioned year 1249. In that time Jindřich Liechtenstein worked in the office of King Ottokar II of Bohemia and for his service he received the first estate of Mikulov, which actually brings him to the territory of the Czech kingdom. Later in 1370 they bought Valtice, in 1570 Lednice etc. The estate was very large and formed an economic unit which functioned in a unique way. Yes, during the First Czechoslovak Republic there was some reduction based on the land reform, however the estate, as I said, was running that well, that it did not have any substantial effect, that it would have somehow collapsed or anything, it simply went on running basically until World War II. At that time, in 1938, Franz I was the head of the house and his wife, Elsa Gutman, was of Jewish origin. When Hitler seized Austria in spring 1938, she as a Jewish was in danger and immediately fled to Czechoslovakia. However, her husband died in July 1938. Princess Elsa then left for Liechtenstein where she survived the war. She died in the Switzerland in 1947 and successor Franz Josef II realized that the situation in Central Europe would be very complicated and therefore in 1938 he, for the first time in the history, decided to leave Vienna and Valtice, which were the main residences, for Vaduz in Liechtenstein. And thanks to the tie of Liechtenstein and the Switzerland, the union which was formed in the 1920s, Liechtenstein managed to keep neutrality. It was not attacked though a national socialist putsch was attempted in spring 1939 but it was suppressed. And after war, unfortunately the influence, we have to say that that of the Communists, caused that there were simply efforts to take away properties from the family, because already in 1947 the courts were ready to declare that the presidential decrees of Edvard Beneš should not affect these properties. However, Communist Julius Ďuriš, the Minister of Agriculture at that time, said that if the court delivered such a verdict, then same as in that time, in 1947, Lex Schwarzenberg was adopted, there would be a Lex Liechtenstein adopted. The lawsuit lasted until 1951 when it was finally ended by the Communist justice which declared that it was generally known that the Liechtensteins were Germans and that the Beneš Decrees affect them. It is necessary to say that it does not correspond to the historical reality at all because already at the end of the 19th century Emperor František Josef I of Austria-Hungary had to deal with the position of the Prince of Liechtenstein and his family within Austria-Hungary by issuing a special legal act, because they were not the citizens of Austria-Hungary but citizens of Liechtenstein which was established in 1719 and has existed so far, but they had the rights of the citizens of Austria-Hungary and the fact that their native language was German, that was the same for the Swiss and the Austrians and they were not taken as Germans after the war. It means that there were efforts of the upcoming Communist nomenklatura to deprive them of the property and that happened, as I'm saying, finally in 1951.

M - Can you at least tell us whether you think that the property disputes, which are still ongoing, have any good solution?

DH - It can be briefly said that mostly Czech courts reasoned in the sense that considering the international overlap they are not competent to decide. It means that in this moment, the case is at the International Court for Human Rights in Strasbourg. It is basically a dispute between two sovereign states, the Principality of Liechtenstein and the Czech Republic and the Liechtenstein side is ready for a dialogue with the Czech side because there is absolutely no intention to restore justice by creating any new injustice. The time which has passed since the time when these things happened has been long and cannot be simply crossed out. It means to negotiate some fair settlement, some win-win solution. And it is only about the property, or part of property, which is owned by the state, without any compensation for the property which would not be restored. It is not about what is held by private entities, municipalities, regions, church, it hasn't been included and will not be. It means it is some part, but as I say, it is mainly about the agreement to negotiate a settlement which would be convenient for both, the Czech as well as Liechtenstein sides. And the Liechtenstein side is

ready even for big investments into this huge cultural heritage which is in this country. Even in the economic sense of the word.

M- When we look at the citizens of Liechtenstein, do they have any dominant feature and characteristics which is interesting?

DH - It is surely a very interesting country. It is necessary to say that there are only 38 000 residents but over 20 000 people commute there every day for work. It is the only country in the world where the Swiss go as gastarbeiters. People there speak a very interesting dialect which to non-locals reminds of Swiss German, but the official language is German. So, you can easily communicate in German and as I met people there, they are very open, helpful and uncomplicated. The bureaucracy there cannot be overgrown, they have only five members of the government, it shows that the things really had to work well. And when I had the opportunity to communicate with some members of the government and even with the princely family and it is indeed very uncomplicated, very pleasant, for example, we exchange emails with the Hereditary Prince Alois, which is interesting, simply uncomplicated, simple, forthcoming, very pleasant.

M - From which the credit and respect is derived for the state which is the size of Říčany in Prague-East?

DH - It is a fascinating story of success and some prophetic visions because when, at the turn of the 17th and 18th century, Prince Hans Adam I bought the estates of Schellenberg and Vaduz, nobody would have thought in what these, at that time economically absolutely insignificant areas, would once turn. And the country survived sovereign, its sovereignty was not challenged even during the Napoleon era. And the same happened later, during World War II, neither Napoleon nor Hitler occupied the country. I believe that the politics which can combine this deep continuity, historical experience, modern technology and the necessity to be on the top, it relates to modern technologies, agriculture expanding to the United States, to India, forestry for example in Austria, these are fascinating things which simply show that when a country is not burdened, as I've said, with some twists, turns and revolutions, it is a great added value.

M - Considering these historical connections, I presume it is not a coincidence that the consulate is seated in Brno, isn't it?

DH - Exactly. The centre of the historical economic units was exactly in South Moravia. It means that Brno as the historical capital of Moravia, it is the logic centre and it was the reason why it was decided to open the Honorary Consulate in Brno, in the city centre at the Dominikánské square and it is a very pleasant environment. And on the other hand, the territory of my activity includes the whole Czech Republic.

M - So I would say that you as a domesticated Prager, and a life-long lover of South Bohemia, you have now extended your activities to South Moravia. You will become a South Moravian.

DH - Of course, that my dialect, or rather the absence of the dialect, shows that I am not a native, but I must say I've met there many nice and helpful people. However, South Moravia and Brno is not an unknown territory for me because many state-funded institutions of the Ministry of Culture are seated there with which I was in contact and for about seven years I was teaching there public relations at the Police Academy as an external lecturer, so it is not a terra incognita for me.

M - You know, as HR workers are used to ask, where do you see yourself in a couple of years, what is your objective?

DH - Although my name is Daniel, I am no prophet and I leave it up to God's will.

M - I would like to thank you very much for this interview and I am looking forward to meeting you again sometime in the future.

DH - Thank you for inviting me.

M - Once again, you've heard our today's guest, Daniel Herman, currently the Honorary Consul of Liechtenstein in the Czech Republic. Eva Hůlková wishes you a good time with other programmes on Czech Radio Plus.

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