

MAIN THEME – INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL HERMAN

THE LIECHTENSTEINS ARE READY FOR HUGE INVESTMENTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC



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Lichtenštejnové jsou tradičním rodem, jeho předky můžeme vystopovat až do středověkých dob. Jak ale tato rodina funguje v roce 2022? Navazují i na vás

KNĚŽNA BYLA ŽIDOVSKÉHO PŮVODU,
LICHTENŠTEJNOVÉ SE NEDOPUSTILI ŽÁDNÉ
KOLABORACE S NACISTY. NEBYLI NĚMCI A NAVÍC ANI
OBČANY RAKOUSKA-UHERSKA, CÍSAŘ FRANTIŠEK
JOSEF I. TOTIŽ VYŘEŠIL POSTAVENÍ KNÍŽETE A JEHO
RODINY V RAKOUSKU-UHERSKU ZVLÁŠTNÍ PRÁVNÍ
NORMOU.

Text: Jan Januš

The Liechtensteins are ready for huge investments in Czechia

Since last year, Daniel Herman, the ex-minister of culture, has been the Honorary Consul of the Principality of Liechtenstein in the Czech Republic. Although the relations between both the countries have a long historical tradition, they have been recently marked with disputes about former princely property, for example the castles in Lednice and Velké Losiny. "It is not important who wins over the other. Liechtenstein intends to get a win-win solution. A fair agreement, acceptable by both the fair partners," says Herman who was brought to his present position also by his interest in historical monuments. By the way, he himself from time to time becomes a guide at the castle of Hluboká nad Vltavou.

The Liechtensteins belongs among the oldest noble families in the Czech territory. How did our mutual relations look back in history?

The relations between the Czech lands and Liechtenstein, respectively the family of Liechtenstein, are indeed very ancient. They date back to the middle of the 13th century. There are a very few families with such intensive Czech relations. Already Ottokar II of Bohemia, the Iron and Golden King, invited the Liechtensteins to cooperate and since that time they were present in the Czech territory, especially in south Moravia and Silesia, but to a certain extent even in Bohemia. Their presence was growing during the time. Already in 1370 they bought Valtice, in 1575 Lednice. Their economic engagement in the Czech lands began to be significant already in these historical times.

The Liechtenstein state established in 1719, i.e. more than 400 years after the first traces of the Liechtensteins in the Czech territory. Also later, the mutual relations were rather intensive, mainly in the field of economy, but also administration. Many officials who administered the Liechtenstein state came from the Czech lands, from Moravia. It was like that until World War II when the acute danger of Nazism after 1938 caused that for the first time in the 800-year-long history the reigning prince left Czechoslovakia and Austria for Liechtenstein. Surely Princess Elsa Gumann, the wife of the reigning Prince Franz I, played an important role in that move because she was of Jewish origin. After the annexation of Austria when strict anti-Semite laws started to apply, the Princess left for Czechoslovakia and then to Switzerland where she survived the war.

After war, however, Czechoslovakia confiscated Liechtenstein property...

Something similar as in the Napoleonic wars happened during World War II. Neither Napoleon, nor Hitler occupied Liechtenstein. After World War II lot of injustice was committed against many citizens. The influence of the Communists was growing and therefore the big noble families, the Schwarzenbergs in Bohemia and the Liechtensteins in Moravia, were affected by various legal measures. In case of the Liechtensteins, it was done by the Presidential Decrees of Edvard Beneš which should not have been applied to the family at all. As I have already said, the Princess was of Jewish origin, the Liechtensteins did not commit any collaboration with the Nazis. They were not Germans, nor the citizens of Austria-Hungary, Emperor Franz Josef I settled the position of the Prince and his family in Austria-Hungary by a special law. They were citizens of Liechtenstein and they had the rights and duties of the citizens of Austria-Hungary. There was no legal ground to apply the Beneš Decrees, however the Communists were strengthening and they wanted, if I say it openly, to rob these aristocratic families. But this is the burden of last decades, of the second half of the 20th century. Before that, there were three quarters of a millennium, and that is much stronger and more intensive and that is what needs to be continued. It brought mutual benefits and it is something which is inspirative even for the future.

In other words, the Liechtensteins are "our" aristocracy?

Definitely, same as the Schwarzenbergs, but only for four centuries longer. The Liechtensteins are deeply rooted in the Czech, Moravian and Silesian lands. However, the current relations get complicated by the lawsuits about the former Liechtenstein properties, which are going on at the European Court for Human Rights as well as at Czech courts. In the video programme Lawyers & Business: FORUM all debaters agreed that there should be some agreement made between the Czech Republic and Liechtenstein, and that these problems cannot be solved only by courts and historians. Do you see it the same way?

It is about agreeing. The Liechtensteins are very wise people, it is confirmed by that economic miracle, as we can call the principality. And they know that the wheel of history cannot be turned back. Something happened and it cannot be undone. However, for over 30 years we have been building legal state and therefore we cannot close eyes from big injustice which had happened. It is not about one winning over the other. Liechtenstein intends to get a win-win solution. A fair agreement, acceptable by both the fair partners. It is necessary to say that none of those who had the direct responsibility for former illegal steps is still alive. It is more about the factual level. If we want to deal with the Communist heritage, and this is one of its manifestations, it is necessary to see it with a virtue and independence. Yes, lawsuits are going on because if they were not going on, the deadlines would expire and it would not be possible to return to it. But I repeat, what matters is the effort to agree, in a fair, win-win way. For example, in Austria, which is a certain parallel, we can see how the Liechtenstein management looks in another country and what a bonus the Liechtenstein investments are. And they would be the same bonus for the Czech Republic. Nobody would lose anything. The Liechtensteins feel strong responsibility for the heritage from their ancestors and it motivates them to bridge some things that happened and were against law with an agreement and a way to collaboration.

In other words, if the Czech Republic gives castles and land plots to the Liechtensteins it will not completely lose them but will support their further development?

Exactly. Same as nobody took St. Vitus Cathedral to Vatican, which is, of course, a nonsense, nobody will take the castle of Velké Losiny to Liechtenstein. It is about finding an agreement, perhaps in the form of a foundation-like cooperation between two sovereign countries. The Liechtensteins are ready for investments, the lawyers can then think of other steps. I don't know, I am not a lawyer.

But still, with respect to your experience and knowledge of Liechtenstein, how do you assess the quality of the performance of right and justice in both the countries?

The Principality of Liechtenstein is a classic West European country, a cultivated one, where it was not necessary to invest energy into permanent renovations after wars or violent revolutions. It is a big plus. The Czech Republic has been building a free and democratic society for over 30 years. However, the time of Communism, basically a half of the century, brought rather substantial notches in the legal system. The First Republic took over a cultivated legal system from Austria-Hungary but the Nazis and later the Communists moved it back by decades. We are coping with a rather grave heritage. However, I think the journey has started, the development goes in a good direction. We are members of international communities, political as well as defensive ones. And we build the

legal state, we have institutions which guarantee the principles which must be observed. It is probably necessary to have a certain level of tolerance and patience, the burden is huge.

The relations between the states are one thing, but the relations between private companies and business exchange another. How is that successful between the Czech Republic and Liechtenstein?

In terms of exchange in business, education and culture, it works very well. However, we have to realize that Liechtenstein is a small country, it has 38 thousand inhabitants. The numbers concerned are not comparable with the U.S. or Japan. Especially in the field of information technologies there are some companies represented in the Czech Republic, for example Hilti is quite visible. There are also companies operating in our country, which work in healthcare, for example with dental prosthetics or optical devices. As far as the cooperation in the field of culture is concerned, I would highlight a rather interesting case of the Liechtenstein crypt in Vranov u Brna. Although it is not owned by the Liechtensteins nor they have raised any claim for it because it is owned by the church, the Prince of Liechtenstein invested almost CZK 60 million into its renovation. The readiness of the Liechtensteins to participate in the renovation of the common cultural heritage is huge. Another field which we have not yet named is agriculture, especially forestry. The Liechtenstein company LIECO is on the top level and already cooperates with the Mendel University. And the renovation of forests affected by bark beetle is a big theme, same as drought which impacts the quality of agricultural and forest production.

The Liechtensteins are a traditional family, we can trace their ancestry to the Middle Ages. However, how does the family function in 2022? I also refer to your interview for the Czech Radio where you mentioned that you exchanged e-mails with the reigning prince...

For me it is a very inspirative symbiosis of deep continuity and a hand on the pulse of the present time. It is a very ancient family and there is an English proverb which says that a suit is well worn only by the fourth generation. And it is obvious there. If you are systematically brought up for a certain mission, responsibility, even for other people, and for things entrusted to you, it must be seen somewhere. At the same time, the Liechtensteins live a very simple life, they go to normal schools, travel with normal airlines not private jets. And yes, the communication with the hereditary Prince Alois who is the factual head of the state, is without any problems. If I compare it for example with my government experience, to approach him is less complicated than to approach many of our ministers.

Despite that I expect that when meeting the family one must observe a certain protocol...

Of course. For many years, I worked as a secretary and later the spokesperson of the Archbishop of Prague. Until 1941, the archbishops of Prague were using the title Prince - Archbishop of Prague, the last one was Karel Kašpar. And this high church hierarchy and high aristocracy are very similar in some respect. In diplomacy, it is necessary to observe the etiquette, in private, human communication, however, it is very uncomplicated and pleasant environment. You have to know and observe things like correct titles. The Prince is correctly addressed as "Your Serene Highness".

What in your opinion should everybody see when visiting Liechtenstein? Or what buildings or monuments are your favourite?

I love nature and Liechtenstein is immensely beautiful country. I would recommend every visitor taking good shoes to go hiking in the Alps, for example in the village of Malbun. I went there to a mountain chapel, built ca 10 years after World War II. You will find there expressions of thanks for protecting the Principality of Liechtenstein from the horrors of war. I realized how happy the people are when they can live in a country which was saved from these horrors. I profess Christianity and resting in Saviour's arms, in that lovely nature it is something which uplifts the soul, the heart and cultivates. It is also very interesting to see how grapevines are grown. And, of course, the castle in Vaduz where the princely family lives, or the museums in Vaduz. The lovers of monuments as well as of nature and wine will enjoy the visit. There are things to be discovered in Liechtenstein.

How did you get to the position of Liechtenstein's Consul?

I love monuments. And the huge culture heritage which the Liechtensteins created here was the cultural bridge between myself and the Ambassador of Liechtenstein who is herself born Princess of Liechtenstein. We met in the time when I was the Minister of Culture; the ambassadors visit members of the government, it is on their agenda. And I may say we understood each other immediately. The Ambassador then gave me many books, we talked more and more and I also visited her several times in Vienna where she resides. We should perhaps say that Liechtenstein has only eight embassies in the world, otherwise it is represented mainly by the Switzerland and in some cases by Austria, and that is only in the countries of significant importance, among which the Czech Republic belongs. After that I received an invitation whether I would like to consider representing the Principality of Liechtenstein as the Honorary Consul in the Czech Republic. Which is a certain novelty, it has not been here yet, although it was considered in the 1930s. In the moment I ended with active politics, I said yes. I extremely appreciate the invitation from His Serene Highness. We opened the office in Brno which during the regional establishment was the capital of Moravia and also the administrative centre of Liechtenstein estates. It is logic, the historical memory is more vivid there, south Moravia and Silesia are strongly connected with Liechtenstein tradition. Nevertheless, the whole Czech Republic is in my competence. I am a sort of extended hand of the Liechtenstein Embassy seated in Vienna.

Mgr. Daniel Herman

Honorary Consul of the Principality of Liechtenstein in the Czech Republic. He was the Minister of Culture in the government of Bohuslav Sobotka, a member of Parliament and also a former head of the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and the spokesperson of the Czech Bishops' Conference. He is a member of the Christian Democratic Party and was the party's vice-chairman in the past. He studied Catholic theology at the Charles University, he is a laicized priest.