



EMBASSY
OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN

BOTSCHAFT
DES FÜRSTENTUMS LIECHTENSTEIN

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“Liechtenstein – Diplomacy of a Small State at Work”

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Dear Professor Wellman, dear Honorary Consuls, dear Students of DePaul University, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am grateful to you for inviting me today. There could hardly be a better fit for me than speaking at your distinguished university. As you may have heard I am not only my country’s Foreign Minister, but also the Minister of Education. So, I will aim high today and hope to be both informative and instructive when I talk about Liechtenstein’s foreign policy and the role of diplomacy in our international relations. A few may have noticed that I am also the Minister of Sport, but I am not sure how we can fit in that element as well. Suggestions are always welcome.

I would like to divide my remarks into two parts. First, I will give you a short introduction to Liechtenstein’s history, its policy system and its foreign policy. And then I would like to talk more about diplomacy in particular and how a country like Liechtenstein tries to make a difference in the world. I am happy to have a discussion at the end if you have questions.

So, let me begin by making a simple point: Liechtenstein has existed for more than three centuries and has been continuously sovereign as a country for 215 years. No forced changes to the border, no occupation,

no wars on our territory, and all this during a period of extreme turmoil in Europe culminating in the two world wars of the last century. Of course, there were periods in our history when we were lucky not to become collateral damage of some major power-reshuffling on our continent – many if not most of our European neighbors have. But I maintain today that we were also masters of our own fate at decisive moments in time – with great diplomatic skill, solid dependable relations to other countries and a vision of a world that is governed by law, not might.

Not that we ever tried to use might on others, but Liechtenstein did once maintain a military contingent as part of its commitments under the German Confederation. We abandoned that path over 150 years ago, and it is perhaps noteworthy that to this day we have not entered into any defense agreements. Diplomacy and international law have always been the key elements of protecting our sovereignty to the outside world. This is also how we came to spearhead efforts to outlaw the crime of aggression and making it part of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

In Liechtenstein, we have a broad consensus on a political system that promotes long-term stability. Liechtenstein is a monarchy and a democracy at the same time. The Reigning Prince and the people are its two sovereigns. Their cooperation together as a government is defined in what sounds a little bit complicated - Liechtenstein is a constitutional hereditary monarchy on a democratic and parliamentary basis. This means that the Reigning Prince and Parliament share power through a system of checks and balances. The people of Liechtenstein have voted for the current version of the constitution with an overwhelming 2/3 majority in 2003. The democratic element in our constitution is particularly pronounced in the fact that the people can challenge any law, important financial decisions and international treaties by a direct vote, even the monarchy itself. And the people have the right to initiate laws and constitutional changes themselves. That means, we have a very strong mechanism of direct democratic accountability in our domestic political system and politicians are well advised to consult broadly with the people on their plans and initiatives to make sure they are not repealed and reflect the popular will.

For a country the size of Liechtenstein, 62 square miles and 40'000 inhabitants, it comes as no surprise that preserving our sovereignty is our primary foreign policy goal. I do believe that every country in the world shares that goal, but different countries may have different means to achieve it. For Liechtenstein it is clear that we can only think of our sovereignty in terms of cooperation, integration and the rule of law, never in terms of isolationism or even aggressive behavior towards other nations.

Integration and cooperation have been our path to stability and prosperity. For almost a hundred years we have had a customs union with our neighbor Switzerland, abandoning our borders and opening our economies to each other. This customs union served as Liechtenstein's first major foray into expanding its economy both regionally and globally. Since 1995 we are also part of the European single market through our membership in the European Economic Area together with Iceland, Norway and the EU, and thus fully integrated in the European economy which encompasses 450 Million people. Though it requires that we adopt into law thousands of European Union acts, we have never interpreted this as a loss in sovereignty, quite the contrary: it is an affirmation of Liechtenstein's sovereignty to closely maintain and expand relations with its neighbors and its broader neighborhood. This has proven to be a very successful strategy for us. Today, our economy is highly diversified and competitive. It provides more jobs than Liechtenstein has inhabitants and it sustains a very elevated standard of living.

As our foreign policy took shape in the 20th century, the role of international organizations has always been of paramount importance. We have sought membership in regional organizations early on, for example in the Council of Europe. A key milestone has been becoming a member of the United Nations in 1990. The basic idea of the United Nations is the sovereign equality of States – meaning “one State, one vote”. This makes the United Nations the prime expression of inclusive multilateralism. We have seen in the past that the idea of multilateralism as an approach to global governance can come under pressure. Yet, I am heartened that our recent experiences with the pandemic and climate change have shown how relevant the United Nations is to people and countries around the globe.

Let me also underline one important point here: it is a common misconception that multilateralism only serves the smaller members of the international community. Multilateralism is also in the direct interest of larger countries. Only if everybody can meaningfully participate in decision-making, do decisions have the necessary legitimacy to be implemented. Who could reasonably say today that the problems of climate change and international security can be solved by a few? We are all affected, we all need to act, and we need to do so together.

And let me also add another point here that is worth mentioning: Inclusiveness promotes stability and diffuses tension. Smaller States intimately know this to be true, while the bigger States sometimes seem to forget. They certainly knew this to be true at the time when they founded the United Nations on the rubble of the World War II.

What does that all mean for Liechtenstein's diplomacy? How does our foreign service work in practice?

In short: We have to use the formats at our disposal as best we can. We have to make ourselves known as a responsible and trustworthy partner and we have to build bridges and form alliances to achieve our goals. In our bilateral relations, we strongly promote the regular exchange at the Ministerial level. I just was in Washington last week to meet with various counterparts and members of Congress, and I intend to continue and foster that personal dialogue. We have excellent bilateral relations with the United States and there are many geopolitical topics of interest to both of us that demand our continuous attention. We fully support the US initiative to strengthen democracy and fight back against authoritarian tendencies. Liechtenstein is a trusted partner in this. We have led on important initiatives at the United Nations to hold the Syrian government to account for the atrocious acts against its own population. It was Liechtenstein's initiative to create an Accountability Mechanism for Syria (IIIM) – to this day the most concrete path to justice for thousands of victims of the gravest international crimes against the Syrian people. More recently we have successfully put forward an initiative on Myanmar, to condemn the military coup and call for a stop to the arms flow into the country. All this with the strong support of the US.

You may ask yourself: Why is Liechtenstein a leading voice on these situations when we do not have any direct military engagement or strong economic interests?

The answer is simple: If we do not react to massive violations of our common rule-book, first and foremost the UN Charter, the international order that we have built together risks erosion, with a potentially massive price for Liechtenstein and other countries alike. We have to be serious about holding each other to account for the obligations we have under international law, towards each other as States, but also to the people we serve. There lies the difference between norms and just words on paper. Maybe as a small State we are sometimes more aware of the risks we run if a few are allowed to undermine our collective achievements in international law.

What does all that mean in practice, in the everyday work of Liechtenstein diplomats?

I am proud to say that I am heading a diplomatic service that is limited in numbers, but unlimited in innovation, expertise and aspiration. We notice time and again in our work that being equally good than others in what we do is often not enough. We have to be more creative, more committed and sometimes quicker if we want to make a difference. Our diplomats are a rare combination of allrounders, with deep expertise in specific fields. We cannot afford to entertain silos in our work and thus a Liechtenstein diplomat in the course of her career is often exposed to the broad range of diplomatic activity our administration faces. At the same time, each and every diplomat brings to the table specific interests and

qualifications that allow her to strengthen Liechtenstein's profile in a priority area. This is how we have become a leading voice on international criminal justice and a driving force behind the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

And sometimes, there are areas of engagement that evolve in unforeseen and very interesting ways. I will give you another example: Liechtenstein is a longstanding advocate for the right to self-determination – one of the most fundamental principles in international law. At Princeton University, there is an Institute called the Liechtenstein Institute on Self-Determination which has been conducting research and educating students on many different expressions of that principle for many years. When you look at today's world, traditional obstacles to self-determination are largely overcome: colonialism is mostly an issue of the past. But there are new challenges. The effects of climate change, for example, threaten the very existence of some States. Rising sea-levels risk to wash away entire nations and directly challenge the survival of a number of small island States. What does self-determination mean for them in light of these apocalyptic scenarios? A lack of self-determination can also be a driver of conflict. Liechtenstein advocates for the inclusion of self-determination aspects in conflict mediation efforts. This can help to diffuse tension and peace agreements to last longer.

I am taking this example to show how Liechtenstein's diplomacy can make a difference beyond our borders. Given our limited size, maybe we are more keenly aware that our stability and prosperity as a nation will always depend on the stability and prosperity of others. This is why Liechtenstein so strongly supports the United Nations' efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. These goals represent the most ambitious and comprehensive agenda ever devised by humankind: eradicate hunger and poverty in one generation, find a sustainable way of living together, ensure gender equality and health for all, and reduce inequalities among and within nations. This is a Herculean task to be sure, but we must try as hard as we can. We owe it to you and the generations after you, and we will be rightly held to account for our achievements and shortcomings. Here again, Liechtenstein tries to make a very concrete contribution to one of the goals enshrined in the SDGs: we are leading a project to fight modern slavery and human trafficking in cooperation with the finance sector, to dry up the money flows of this heinous but very lucrative crime. Many forget that slavery exists to this day – 40 Mio people are living in such conditions. We simply cannot accept this to go on, and I hope we can turn the tide once and for all.

This is a good example of how I see myself in my role as Foreign Minister. Of course, I am responsible for the whole range of foreign policy priorities of my country. But initiatives like FAST call for a strong personal

commitment which I am happy and proud to give. The fight against modern slavery is not a diplomatic problem to be solved. It is a human tragedy and an atrocious crime that needs personal political leadership to raise awareness and gather the necessary momentum for change.

The same personal leadership is needed when it comes to the broader question of gender equality. I am not telling this solely to the women in the audience, I am telling it to everybody. Liechtenstein has long been an advocate for women's participation in political processes as part of its support of the Women, Peace and Security Agenda of the UN Security Council. Conflicts are resolved better if women are mediating, peace agreements hold longer with women sitting at the table, that much we know from relevant research. Now we have to get much more serious in applying that knowledge and bringing more women into positions of decision-making. I just hosted a Female Foreign Ministers dinner in New York, 36 Ministers were invited, out of 193 in total. I am part of a Government with 60% women, I believe that we are leading the world on that account. We have come a very long way to reach this point in Liechtenstein and we have to go much further. Our task is monumental and we cannot yield.

I have been Foreign Minister for half a year now and I must say it is a very rewarding task. I have been a member of the Liechtenstein Government before, where I served as Minister of Home Affairs, Education and Environment. Many of my tasks then had a strong domestic focus. Today, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, I believe that the dialogue with the public on foreign policy matters should be strengthened. I instruct my diplomats to engage in that conversation, to bring our profession closer to the people and to inspire new generations of diplomats to follow their steps. Of course, ours is the international stage, but we also have a duty to our people to explain what we are standing up for: To defend Liechtenstein's interests as a respected member of the international community, and to work towards a vision of the world where freedom, dignity and prosperity for all prevail. That vision is under pressure and our way of living is being challenged. Geopolitical tensions are rising. We experience increased volatility and a recalibration of great power relations. I believe that makes voices like ours even more important.

In this context, if I had one bit of advice for you as students of applied diplomacy, it is the following:

Of course, you need to know your trade and you should equip yourself with all the necessary tools to do a job that can, at times, be quite scripted and formalized. But you also have to nourish your passions. Serving the interests of your country also allows you to make a personal difference. If that is your goal, being a diplomat can be one of the most rewarding experiences – while I admit that sometimes it can also be frustrating. But let me say this: diplomacy is driven by people, often the most skilled and devoted among

us. As a diplomat you should not see yourself as just a small part in a big machine. You can be an important voice in an organic system shaping the policy of your country and far beyond. There are few careers that compare to diplomacy and a lot of courage and perseverance is needed to embark on it.

And one final personal recommendation: Keep an open mind and follow your interests. There is no classic diplomatic career in my view. Our foreign service has a very broad variety of backgrounds and degrees. Chances are best you succeed in what you are passionate about, be it international law, politics, even philosophy. I wish you all the best and much success as you take on this exciting journey. Thank you.