

How to lose half of Moravia quickly and easily. Let's sue with the Liechtenstein family until the very bitter end

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A quick agreement with the Liechtenstein family would be the most convenient for the Czech Republic. However, we will rather turn one failed confiscation into a tragedy in court and then we will look deeply moved by its injustice.

One European country is again a step closer to extend its territory ten times. No, we are not on the threshold of another world war, just Liechtenstein filed a complaint against the Czech Republic with the European Court for Human Rights. Those who are familiar with the scramble over the properties confiscated after World War II from this, once powerful, family know that it must have come.

The Liechtenstein princely family has been trying for years to get some compensation for properties which were, in its opinion illegally, expropriated based on the Beneš Decrees, however the Czech Republic refuses to discuss any agreement. And so we are facing an inevitable situation: as a pretext Liechtenstein took a few hectares of forest near Prague about which there is currently a lawsuit going on. In reality, it is a precedent for large properties mainly in Moravia. Beginning with the Lednice-Valtice Complex and ending with dozens of thousands of hectares of farm and forest land.

We can think whatever we want about the whole dispute, however, it is indisputed that while the Liechtenstein lawyers know very well what they are doing and how elaborate arguments they have, the Czech side is completely confused and desperate.

And that is why it may all end very badly for us.

Relation warming which ended freezing

It is indeed pity where the Czech-Liechtenstein dispute reached. First, the princes tried an offensive of charm against the Czech Republic. Despite all property issues with this country, Liechtenstein established a commission of historians in 2009 to settle mutual disputes. The common declaration reads: "Both the countries believe that their relations could be developed based on their common heritage and at the same time all the discrepancies, which emerged during the changing historical times, might be overcome."

The Liechtenstein family also started to invest into their former properties in the Czech Republic; instead of articles on Hitler's villains, tabloids suddenly started to publish titles as "A super-rich man with blue blood in Czechia: Prince of Liechtenstein enchanted by Opava". However, there was not any other forthcoming gesture. So, it ended up at courts. First at Czech ones and now already at European ones.

And it does not look well. While the Czech side has not yet any logical defence available against the Liechtenstein family, the princely family continues to repeat its own one and has enough evidence to prove it. Prince Konstantin repeated it last time in 2016 when the litigation started in the Czech Republic: "Just to make it clear, we have never challenged the Beneš Decrees themselves. Neither in 1945, nor in 1951, nor today. What we say is that the application of the Decrees against the

Liechtenstein family has been unjust and illegal. We were neither collaborators, nor Germans. And, truly speaking, we were neither Czechoslovak citizens. These are objective historical facts.

Many Czechs will surely say: Many Germans and traitors said so during confiscations after World War II. Also, right after the current complaint in Strasbourg was announced, similar texts again appeared about Hitler's helpers, collaborators and efforts to rewrite the results of World War II.

However, the story of Liechtenstein is so barking mad that it is indeed unparalleled.

The Czech must know who the German is here!

Although the Czechoslovak post-war regime was very skilful in confiscating properties, in the case of the princes it failed wherever it could. The properties were confiscated from them because they were Germans. But this argument is based on water when speaking about a reigning family from an independent state. The Czech courts argued that it was generally known that they were true Germans but they had no evidence. Altogether, in 1930 the princes were registered as German based on their language on one paper which even does not bear an official signature.

To turn the Liechtenstein family into traitors might have been a bit easier for the courts, however, with Princess Elsa being of Jewish origin it would have been rather complicated. Nevertheless, they really cannot be taken for Germans and the courts had doubts about the confiscation already before February 1948.

It all fell into slumber after February 1948, however, it does not mean that the Communist tough guys would not be afraid of international disputes. Paradoxically, the Communists even strengthened the Liechtenstein claims with their international agreements. "To understand their position, it is important to realize that for example the Swiss, speaking German, were compensated for confiscation already by an international agreement from 1949. The same was agreed with Austria in 1974. The dictate of one language, which decided after the war who was German and who was not, was broken. It only never touched the Liechtenstein family," historian Václav Horčíčka explained in one interview.

In the end, the Communists compensated even Austrian noble families. In the case of Austria, the compensations totalled to ca one billion schillings, in the case of Switzerland it was 71 million of Swiss francs. Even the Stalinists were afraid of international lawsuits.

Is it going to be expensive or the most expensive?

After 1989, it was clear that this is a case which will return to us as a much bigger one and, unless it is settled between Prague and Vaduz, it will be on international level. Let's not forget that it is not only about the princes but also about other thirty people with Liechtenstein nationality.

Prague had enough time to take some reasonable stand and find an agreement. This possibility was also helped by the offensive of charm and the establishment of diplomatic relations ten years ago. Also, everybody knows very well for a long time what sum the play is about and what it is necessary to bargain: in current prices the complete financial compensation would be, roughly estimated, between 1 and 1.5 billion francs. If we consider just one quarter of this sum, we would arrive at 300 million francs, which is ca CZK 7.5 billion.

But perhaps we will rather give up half of Moravia after the lawsuits continue developing worse.