

The Principality and House of Liechtenstein during the war:

from the ban of white knee socks to the vow of loyalty and back

"Wearing white knee socks and dirndls has been banned on the estate of Prince of Liechtenstein in south Moravia," reads the Naše Slezsko newspaper in June 1937 in an article titled Prince of Liechtenstein against provocateurs: "None of princely employees is allowed to be a member of the (SudetenGerman) SdP party. New contracts were made with all employees which allow to dismiss them immediately in case they breached the rules. The measure taken by the Prince of Liechtenstein and motivated by his words "you are first the citizens of the Czechoslovak state and then my employees", can be only praised and it would make no harm if former Czech nobility still owning large properties in German regions - for example the Schwarzenberg family - followed his example."

Nothing is like reading period newspapers. The article from Naše Slezsko precisely illustrates the attitudes of František I, Prince of Liechtenstein, towards German National Socialism and to the danger represented by Hitler's Germany not only for the whole world but also for Czechoslovakia, for little Liechtenstein, and, finally, also for the princely family.

Almost 84-year-old Prince could hardly miss what was happening: his wife Elsa von Gutmann came from an important Jewish family and even her marriage with the Prince could not protect her from manifested hostility, psychological bullying and humiliation by anti-Semites and supporters of National Socialism. However, the House of Liechtenstein and the government of the Principality had first to deal with the health condition of the reigning Prince. In the time when his energy and presence were much needed, his illness grew serious, weakening him that much that he had been unable to visit Vaduz since 1935.

The House of Liechtenstein survived 800 years in full strength among others because it mostly reacted in time to the situation in Europe as well as in its own house. This time was no exception: in March 1938, 32-year-old František Josef II became so-called Prince Regent based on an agreement among Prince František I, Liechtenstein's Prime Minister Hoop and Prince Alois, the father of the successor to the throne. What did it mean? The father of the

current reigning Prince Hans Adam II took up the position of the head of state instead of his sick granduncle who retreated to Valtice together with his wife Elsa. The regency did not last long: in July 1938 František I died in Valtice, František Josef II became the reigning prince and Elsa von Gutmann moved to Switzerland where she died in 1947.

The Liechtensteiner made the choice: they thwarted a Nazi putsch

František Josef II Liechtenstein took the role of the regent vigorously. Already on 18 March 1938 he arrived at Vaduz and announced a piece of news unprecedented in the history of the Principality: although he keeps Vienna as one of his seats, he will permanently move to Liechtenstein. "The news," Liechtensteiner Volksblatt wrote a month later, "was joyfully welcome by all."

The people of Liechtenstein understood the step exactly as František Josef II intended. He stressed the role of head of an independent state who should live among his people. Of course, that Prince Regent, the reigning prince since July 1938, did not deal only with moving since his arrival at Vaduz in March. He significantly helped reconcile the local feuding political parties and, together with the government, he prepared the country for the forthcoming years. "In the time when the principality was afraid of being occupied by German troops, František Josef II became the symbol of national sovereignty," reads the brochure titled "Anschluss or sovereignty?" published by the Liechtenstein Regional Museum.

It was understandable that Liechtenstein, which became a neighbour of Hitler's Third Reich after the Anschluss of Austria on 12 March 1938, did not feel safe. The country stopped maintaining an army in 1868 and roughly 8000 citizens could hardly resist even a small, well armoured unit of German Wehrmacht. Why did Hitler hesitate? We know from the period documents that the fate of Liechtenstein was decided on 18 March 1938: Hitler would let the country be because it was too insignificant and - which was perhaps more important - its annexation would be like attacking Switzerland with which Germany wanted to maintain a neutral relationship. However, Hitler's decision was not just black and white. An open occupation was rejected but if there was a pro-German, national-socialist group willing to organize a putsch in Liechtenstein, Germany would support it. Liechtenstein's Prime Minister Hoop wrote in a report after visiting Germany at the end of March 1938: "A national-socialist party determined to join the Reich could expect sympathies and moral

support from Germany. Therefore, it is highly important for the sake of independence of this country to prevent any national-socialist movement from establishing in Liechtenstein."

Some mockers argue that the Principality was simply lucky. Lucky due to its insignificance. As previous sentences document, it was not true. The residents, government as well as Prince František Josef II had to show a lot of courage and own will to be independent of Germany. The crucial days came in March 1939 when the freedom-loving Liechtenstein had to choose a side openly. The resolution of Prime Minister Hoop that a national-socialist movement must be prevented from establishing in the country was not fully met. Still in spring 1938, "The German National Movement in Liechtenstein" started to operate in the country (in 1938-1945 it had 150 to 300 members) and on 24 March 1939 this movement attempted a putsch by declaring an annexation to the Reich and deliberately burning swastikas in public to provoke German troops camping across the border to enter the country. The amateurish but still an attempt at putsch was suppressed by the Liechtenstein police together with crowds of civilians who came to help.

Putting down this Nazi putsch resulted fully in the symbiosis of Prince František Josef II and his people. A month later, on 29 May 1939, a mass demonstration of unity and will for independence took place on a meadow above the Vaduz castle: the Prince vowed loyalty to his people and the people vowed loyalty to their Prince. "We take the oath of loyalty to our Prince, we promise to act according to the Constitution and laws to maintain the safety and development of our country. Let God help us!"

Prince and his regent stand with the Czech

However, God's help was not needed just in Liechtenstein. On 16 March 1939, the Germans established the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and just a few weeks later the central administration of the Liechtenstein estates based in Olomouc was required "to control the administration only in German and to dismiss or retire Czech officials".

While František Josef II was kept busy as the reigning prince in Vaduz at that time, in Czechoslovakia he was represented by his brother, Prince Alfred Liechtenstein who was titled as "General Representative". And this "General Representative" did not comply with the requirement of German authorities. Dr František Svoboda remained the managing director, same as other top

"managers" kept their positions, for example the forest inspector Vepřek, building director Ing Matějů, financial director Knecht and forest councillor Pobudský.

The Protectorate's officials did not give up. In autumn 1939, German authorities established a so-called criminal supervisory office that repeated the requirement to the Liechtenstein family. This time accompanied with a threat that "unless the central administration of the estates adapts to the new situation, a missionary administration shall be imposed on all Liechtenstein estates".

Prince Karel Alfred, whose brother František Josef II had already taken the common princely vow together with the citizens of Liechtenstein, did not comply even this time. At the end of war in 1945, the Liechtenstein family employed 191 Czechs and 24 Germans, while most of the Germans took care of the estates and enterprises in the territory of Austria. According to post-war documents, written for the National Committee in Olomouc "the Liechtenstein central administration worked very hard to mitigate the forced labour of Czech people during the wartime". In numbers: during the war, the Liechtenstein family employed 20 junior foresters, 6 foresters and 36 officials whom they did not need but whom they helped this way to avoid the forced labour.

After 1945, the Czech authorities examined how well the "General Representative" did during the war. A period document for the District National Committee in Olomouc reads:

"From social aspects, the officials and employees of the Liechtenstein estate were provided the best among all Czechoslovak large farm estates. Especially General Representative Prince Karel Alfred Liechtenstein introduced many improvements and he in person elaborated the "Liechtenstein Service Pragmatics, a set of rules which was among all similar guidelines introduced in Czechoslovakia the most convenient for employees. Karel Alfred Liechtenstein always cared that all rights applied equally for Czechs and Germans. It especially included the entitlement for children allowances which he pushed through for Czech employees only with severe difficulties. It was the only case in the Protectorate when there was full and complete equality of Czech and German employees".

The response of Protectorate's authorities was not, of course, mild. Archives are full of names of Liechtenstein employees who were detained during the war. And what is also obvious from the archive materials? Prince

Karel Alfred always tried to take care of every single individual in person. He urged the German authorities, paid lawyers, persuaded.

The arrest of the managing director František Svoboda was probably the most important event in this respect. Svoboda was imprisoned for six months by the Gestapo and finally judged in Wroclaw. The "General Representative" Karel Alfred tried really hard to help his director, sometimes even risking his own safety. Not only did he issue a false certificate for the wife of Dr Svoboda, confirming that she was travelling to Wroclaw to purchase wood on behalf of the Liechtenstein family, to enable her to come to the court, but, despite the protests of German authorities, he himself left for Wroclaw to voluntarily testify in person. Dr František Svoboda was indeed acquitted. His grandson has been in touch with the princely family until these days.

History has no logic. Until these days

While the reigning Prince in Vaduz could more easily enjoy the connection with his people and use the experience of his vow in the meadow above the castle, his representatives in the Protectorate had a much harder time. However, despite the increased pressure in the time of occupation and the ban on gatherings, a church was successfully built for princely money in the village of Tvrdonice in Moravian Slovakia. The ceremony of the church consecration was held on 7 September 1941 and it was an unexpected occasion for a national celebration and manifestation for the whole south Moravian region. The archive documents read: "On behalf of Prince František Josef II, the celebration was visited by his younger brother Jiří Liechtenstein. He ostentatiously walked right behind the church officials, through the village, in the procession of Moravian people dressed in folk-costumes..."

It happened only four years after the granduncle of Prince Jiří, František I, Prince of Liechtenstein, prohibited his employees to wear white knee socks and become members of Sudeten-German party. Two years after the Principality suppressed a Nazi putsch. And four years before the reigning Prince František Josef II was labelled German by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Interior controlled by the Communists, a fact which the Czech authorities have continued to state since.

