

Czechia to the Liechtensteins:

We will not return anything. But you can give us a gift

Last year in March, Ipsos, a UK-based public opinion research institute, published results of a survey carried out in the Czech Republic: 66 % Czechs see the approach of the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation to the dispute with the Czech state as generous. Reason? The Liechtenstein family only claimed back those properties which are still held by the state; does not demand anything which in the meantime was acquired by private entities, municipalities, universities, schools and non-profit organizations. Moreover, in recent years the princely Foundation has been patiently offering not only negotiations about the properties seized by the state but also about potential input from their present sources. The House manages its properties in a responsible way – as a caretaking owner. The public feels it and sees with their own eyes: for example the perfectly renovated Liechtenstein historical palaces in Vienna where the unique princely collection of art is on display.

When the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation learnt from the media last year that the Czech state would stop investing into the historical Liechtenstein monuments which are subject to the lawsuit, the princely family started to think whether there could be a way to agree with the Czech state about sharing these burdens. If the state is unable what if the Foundation itself invested into the renovation of the Liechtenstein monuments in the territory of the Czech Republic? The agreement would be easy: if the monuments stays with the Czech Republic in the very end of the lawsuit, the state will return the investment to the Liechtenstein family. If the Foundation succeeded at the court, the Czech Republic would not return the investment, and its citizens could enjoy historical buildings improved at the cost of the Liechtenstein family

Unfortunately, the National Heritage Institute could not accept such a scheme, reportedly it would be a breach of law. Instead, the National Heritage Institute suggested the Prince to make a donation to the Czech Republic to renovate the monuments.

Most readers may know that many donations were flowing before from Liechtenstein to support Czech cities, municipalities, whole regions and its residents. Hospitals, schools, churches, museums, artworks. Hundreds of them. And we do not have to look back into distant past. It was a few years ago when

the Prince of Liechtenstein renovated the family crypt in Vranov near Brno for tens of millions CZK. Despite the fact he does not own the crypt and that the family currently see the donations in the territory of the Czech Republic in a different way than they did when they owned land and buildings in the country. Or the destructive floods of 2002. You may not remember, but the Principality of Liechtenstein donated millions of korunas to dry and save books and to renovate St. Agnes monastery in Prague; this act came in the time when diplomatic relations between both the countries were not re-established yet.

The reigning Prince Hans Adam II said many times that he does not see ownership as a pure gathering of assets but as a responsibility for properties which were entrusted to each generation only for a certain time. Therefore, the Foundation has never hesitated when a private person or municipality needed an agreement in terms of a construction on disputed land, no matter if it was a water line, pathway to a nursery school, bypass of a city, cycling track or a high-voltage power line. The lawyers of the Liechtenstein family have been dealing with dozens of similar requests in the Czech Republic. They have always tried to comply. The only thing which can slow down the agreement is the applicable legislation or fear. The fear of some institutions that they will be reprimanded by the state for cooperating "with the family with which we do not negotiate".

And this returns the story back to donations: how long can be a relationship successfully maintained with somebody whom the Czech Republic discriminates based on the language and nationality, from whom it took the properties without compensating but from whom it gladly accepts donations to maintain these confiscated properties?

Together?

And still the Czech Republic and the Liechtenstein family have at least the basic in common:

1. None of the parties wants to interfere with the Beneš Decrees.
2. None of the parties wants a full restitution. In case of the princely Foundation this was already proved by its approach to the legal motions, when in 2018 it left out about twenty castles and other valuable assets which are currently owned by municipalities and private entities.

"Still in spring 2020, there was a high probability that the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation would have accepted a settlement, negotiated with the Czech Republic, which would have meant justice (the Czech Republic would recognize that Liechtensteiners are not Germans and the Beneš Decrees were illegally applied to them) and at the same time the Czech Republic would not have to give up all the proprietary rights to all disputable properties," says Michal Růžička, the spokesman of the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation for the Czech Republic.

However, the Czech Republic refused all proposals for negotiations and the way how Czech courts keep deciding made the Liechtenstein government to file an international complaint in Strasbourg within a legal deadline in August 2020. It has changed the dynamism of the lawsuit. The lawsuit which was aptly called by some Czech commentators as "a pointless lawsuit".

Box 1:

Princely Foundation has offered an investment scheme

The Prince of Liechtenstein foundation has already used all possibilities of good will to make the Czech state discuss the so far open issues of the past. Also, the Liechtenstein state has done so on its level:

In 2017/18 Aurelia Frick, the Minister of foreign affairs of the Principality of Liechtenstein, stated again that negotiations are the best way to achieve a solution to the benefit of both sides. The responsible Czech officials did not share this view.

The Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation also appealed to the Czech government. It offered a generous investment programme which would help the Czech Republic to deal with some crucial topics in the field of education, social projects, monument preservation, environment and landscape protection. Also modern alternative conflict resolution mechanisms were proposed. Czech officials did not take up these proposals but pointed to the courts and especially to a pending proceeding that was initiated by the Czech state against the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation in 2014.

The Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation has remained consistent for many years and recently has even intensified its efforts to avoid legal proceedings with the Czech Republic.

*From a press release by the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation,
December 2018*

Box 2:

The Liechtenstein family states that the dispute is not simply about properties but about justice. There has not been recently any evidence which would prove this approach false. With respect to the history of the House, its constitution and traditional responsibility for entrusted estates, every reigning prince sees his properties more in the sense of a long-term responsibility than as short-term marketable assets.

Box 3

To have a prosperous home...

The Liechtenstein family considered Moravia their home for 800 years. Those who feel responsible, naturally want their home to stand up and prosper on a long-term basis. To reach this objective, we had to connect the focus on long-term goals and sustainability with inventiveness and the spirit of enterprise. We sometimes say that our family has survived all the centuries, because we started our sustainable approach already in 1136. And we have never abandoned it. Support of the Mendel University by the Liechtenstein family members has always been part of the belief that science and education lie at the core of promising future. Let me mention several examples: ...In 1894 Prince Johann II founded fruit-growing schools for students' practical studies and in 1895 he founded at Lednice a Higher Fruit-growing and Horticulture School. It later became the Faculty of Horticulture of the Mendel University and, transformed like this, it has existed until these days. In 1912 Prince Johann II I founded the Mendeleum research and plant-breeding centre in memory of J. G. Mendel. The institute continues its advanced scientific work at Lednice as part of the Mendel University. Our efforts came to a complete standstill when in 1945 the properties were illegally confiscated from all Liechtenstein citizens Having

received the prize today, for which I thank once again, I would like to express hope that we can solve the remaining open issues of the past to allow my family and Mendel University not only remember the great past. As I said at the beginning: we have never stopped connecting the focus on long-term goals and sustainability with inventiveness and the spirit of enterprise. We have never forgotten where we were home. As soon as the circumstances are ready, we are ready to have again a much more fruitful role for the Mendel University, Moravia and the whole Czech Republic.

(an excerpt from a speech of thanks which Hereditary Prince Alois gave on the occasion of receiving an award from the Mendel University in Brno in November 2019)

Caption below the historical document:

Your Serenity, President T. G. Masaryk writes to Prince Jan II Liechtenstein on 4 July 1920 expressing his thanks for the donation of three precious paintings to the Masaryk National Fund. Another document of the Presidential office from 1921 reads that "paintings of big value will be on display in the gallery of Rudolfinum".

Caption for the picture:

The Silesian Regional Museum in Opava: the oldest public museum in the territory of the Czech Republic was established thanks to Jan II, Prince of Liechtenstein. This outstanding benefactor had his castle in Opava demolished and donated the land plot together with a substantial financial donation for the construction of so-called Historical Exhibition Building. Between 1884-1929 he also donated precious items from his collections to the Silesian Regional Museum and provided also many other artworks which supplemented the museum funds.