

Liechtenstein lawsuits: We would renovate the monuments at our own expenses, the Foundation said

During the period of lawsuits about the restoration of Liechtenstein monuments, we ourselves will invest into their renovations. Reportedly, that was the offer made to the Czech state by the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation.

However, there has not been made any agreement with the National Heritage Institute. "Last year we learnt from the media that the Czech state would stop investing into those Liechtenstein historical monuments which were subject to the lawsuits. Because Prince Hans Adam II does not see ownership as a mere accumulation of properties but also as responsibility for the properties which were entrusted to us for a certain time, the princely Foundation started to think how to agree with the Czech state about sharing the investments into the monuments for the period of the lawsuits," explained Michal Růžička, the spokesman of the Foundation.

However, the preservationists say they did not reject anything. "We can confirm that a meeting took place. However, we strongly oppose that we would have rejected the offer. At a common meeting, the possibility was mentioned of financial support by the Principality of Liechtenstein for the renovation of state monuments affected by the lawsuit," said Jana Hartmanová, the spokeswoman of the National Heritage Institute.

She added that the National Heritage Institute warned the Foundation that a financial donation agreement is the only possible way how to help in this case. "No concrete offer has been made after that by the Foundation," the spokeswoman added.

However, according to Růžička, the princely Foundation offered to invest into the Liechtenstein monuments in the territory of the Czech Republic during the period of the lawsuit. Provided that the state pledged to return the investment to the Liechtenstein family in future, in the case the monuments remained the property of the Czech state at the end of the lawsuit. "If the monuments were passed to the Foundation, the Czech Republic would not have to return anything," said the representative of the family.

The spokeswoman stressed that despite the filed motions, the National Heritage Institute continued to manage the buildings. In South Moravian region it includes the castles in Bučovice near Vyškov and Lednice and Valtice near Břeclav. "We continue to do emergency repairs and general maintenance with the support from the state budget," she added.

She also mentioned that the National Heritage Institute was currently preparing a project for the renovation of the castle park in Lednice worth CZK 2 million. They want to gather the money from European funds.

Libor Kabát, the mayor of Lednice, knew nothing about the meeting which was rather an informal one. "I think stopping investments into the castle is a big problem. It is especially visible in the park. We communicate with the representatives of the Liechtenstein family, they are helpful. We discussed the land plots which, regardless the courts' verdict, would serve for public purposes. If they offer any solution, it is at least worth considering," the mayor believes.

The topic continues to raise strong emotions among normal people. "I would not return any properties. I consider the theme of the Beneš Decrees as closed for the Czech state. Although the Liechtenstein family were not German, they had affinity with the Nazis, so I strongly oppose. Before the courts deliver verdicts, it is purely logic that the state will not invest into the buildings. I do not much believe in the willingness of the Liechtenstein family to pay the renovations," comments Jan Med who annually visits Valtice.

The representative of the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation: If the state followed written promises made in the 1990s, there would not necessarily be the complaint in Strasbourg this year (Interview with Michal Růžička)

Q: When did the meeting take place and why did the princely family want to help with renovations?

A: Last year, the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation learnt from the media that the Czech state would stop investing into the Liechtenstein historical monuments which were subject to the lawsuits. Because Hans Adam II does not see ownership as a mere accumulation of properties but as responsibility for the properties which were entrusted to us for some time, the princely Foundation started to consider how to agree with the Czech state on shared investments into the monument in the time of the lawsuits. I passed the message to Naděžda Goryczková, the managing director of the National Heritage Institute, that the Liechtenstein side was ready to devise a project together with the Czech preservationists which would support the Liechtenstein cultural heritage and thus all citizens of the Czech Republic.

Q: What did the offer include?

A: The princely Foundation offered that during the period of lawsuits it would invest into the renovations of the Liechtenstein monuments in the territory of the Czech Republic provided the state pledged to return the investment to the Liechtenstein family in future in the case the monuments would remain in the ownership of the Czech Republic in the very end of the lawsuit. If they were passed on the Foundation, the Czech Republic would not have to return anything, and its citizens could enjoy better maintained historical buildings.

Q: Did it affect all monuments in the country which the Liechtenstein family claims?

A: The Foundation was not able to plan so concretely because it does not have enough updated information like the National Heritage Institute. The Liechtenstein side expected to start an expert debate and common decision-making with Czech preservationists. At that time, the media wrote that the castle of Velké Losiny was near an emergency state and that investments in Valtice and Lednice would be significantly reduced.

Q: The National Heritage Institute refused such an offer. What were their arguments?

A: Director Goryczková said that according to law such a scheme was not possible. She instead suggested that Prince could donate money to the Czech Republic to renovate the monuments built by his ancestors.

Q: What did the princely family say?

A: You may know that the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation has donated tens of millions to renovate the family crypt in Vranov near Brno which is not in their ownership. You may not remember that the Liechtenstein side donated millions of korunas to dry up and save books and renovate St. Agnes' Monastery in Prague after the floods in 2002, it means in the time where there were no diplomatic relations between both the countries. And we can list many other donations. It often happens when some of the princely family members come to the Czech Republic, that they are asked for money, for donations on many levels. It all happens in the time when the Czech authorities and judicial institutions continue insisting that the Liechtenstein family have been German and therefore we have to confiscate their properties. Everybody surely understands that it is first necessary to settle this unsustainable and undignified relationship.

Q: Can we conclude that also the lack of willingness from the National Heritage Institute (and the Czech state) to any cooperation or agreement is one of the reasons why Liechtenstein sues the Czech Republic in Strasbourg?

A: I am not the spokesman of the Liechtenstein government and cannot speak on its behalf. Those who read its official statement understand that the reason for the international complaint in Strasbourg is the protection of sovereignty of the Liechtenstein state and the defence of all Liechtenstein citizens which have been wilfully treated as German by the Czech Republic and based on this label several of their fundamental rights are limited. Therefore, the complaint in Strasbourg does not affect only the prince and definitely was not initiated by the condition of the monuments or the willingness or unwillingness of Czech preservationists. However, generally we can, of course, say that if the Czech state spoke with the Liechtenstein family in the past if it, for example, followed the written promises done by Minister of Foreign Affairs Dienstbier at the beginning of the 1990s, the complaint would not be necessarily filed in Strasbourg this year. Then today we would not be forced to speak about donations to renovate monuments, but we could discuss investments or common investments, and, also, for example, the way in which the Liechtenstein family manages forests to prevent a disastrous spread of bark beetle in the territory of the Czech Republic and the end of forests established hundreds and hundreds years ago.

What lawsuits prevent the renovations of castles? (Informative box)

- In the Czech Republic, the princely family of Liechtenstein claims about 60 thousand hectares of farm and forest land and 5 castles including Lednice and Valtice near Břeclav and Bučovice near Vyškov.
- In Lednice they stopped a big renovation projects of the castle park, catacombs under the greenhouse, Moor house and a facility for visitors worth over CZK two hundred millions.
- Also, the project to finish the facilities for visitors and renovation of lofts in the Valtice castle has been stopped. The National Heritage Institute will do just the emergency repairs. It means roofs, roof frames and facades. A similar situation is in Bučovice. Only the renovation of arcades is ready which is an emergency.

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