

Most Czechs think state should make a deal with Liechtensteins. Court hearings are more likely though

Lawsuits filed by the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation against the Czech Republic have been resting in Czech courts pending the start of court hearings. The princely family took the legal step last year after the state had rejected the Liechtensteins' call for talks on the return of their family's assets. To win support for its arguments, the Liechtenstein family has turned to public opinion. That is, an opinion poll it has commissioned with the Ipsos agency.

Some 56 percent of respondents in the Ipsos poll said the Czech Republic should start talks to terminate the post war dispute and find a solution advantageous for both parties. Hence, most Czechs would like the Czech Republic to make a deal with Liechtenstein. Less than one in four respondents said they would leave the matter in the hands of the court.

It is no surprise that the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation is happy with the outcome of the poll. "We were very impressed by the outcome among the young generation," says Foundation spokesman Michal Růžička, highlighting the fact that 68 percent of respondents aged 18-29 said the Czech Republic should open talks with the Liechtenstein family to terminate the dispute.

State says no to talks

As HlídacíPes.org said earlier, Liechtenstein had approached the Czech Republic with two official letters, calling on the state to start talks. It never received a reply.

Czech authorities refer to the validity of the Beneš Decrees, which determined the postwar property seizures, and to the unresolved lawsuit over lands near Říčany, which has ended up at the Constitutional Court. This, however, is a lawsuit filed by the Czech Republic against the Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation in 2014.

The lawsuit was filed after it had turned out that Prince Franz Josef II was still registered as the owner of forests and the land registry had entered the successor Liechtenstein Foundation as their owner.

„The fact that the entry in the land registry was not changed based on the Decrees and the Czech state was not entered as its owner will not change anything about the fact that movable and immovable assets on the territory of today's Czech Republic were in fact seized from the deceased," says Michal Bucháček, spokesman for the foreign ministry.

Last December, Bucháček confirmed on behalf of the ministry that the Czech Republic was not going to negotiate with the Liechtensteins. "This is purely a matter for independent and impartial justice," Bucháček said. At that time, the princely foundation had already sent out reminders and subsequently filed lawsuits which are now waiting in court.

Lawsuits aimed at state assets only

According to its representatives, the Foundation has exhausted all possibilities of peaceful talks with the Czech state. It said the lawsuits had been filed in reaction to a change in the Civil Code setting December 31, 2018 as the ultimate deadline for claiming back unlawfully seized property in court.

The Liechtensteins have called on the state to return all property it had seized – unlawfully, as they insist – from then-owner Franz Josef II, Prince of Liechtenstein, after World War II.

The property includes dozens of thousands of hectares of land, but also the famous chateaux in Lednice and Valtice. The lawsuits, however, only concern property owned by the state, according to the land registry. Property currently owned by third parties (regions, municipalities, universities, non-profit organisations or private owners) is not targeted by the lawsuits.

A poll commissioned by the Foundation has shown that 66 percent of Czechs see steps taken by the Liechtensteins vis-à-vis the Czech Republic so far as generous.

„Most Czech citizens are asking us to lead talks in favour of a successful future and not to lead disputes in courts for many years,” says Alois, Hereditary Prince of Liechtenstein, adding his family is ready to start talks with the Czech Republic any time.

German as a stigma

The Liechtensteins have never accepted the lawfulness of the family property seizure. Their argument is that the Beneš Decrees aimed against Germans, traitors and collaborators should not and could not have been applied against them because they were neither Germans nor traitors nor collaborators.

The fact is that Liechtenstein was a neutral country during the war, it did not diplomatically acknowledge the Bohemian and Moravian Protectorate established by Germany, and the Liechtensteins supported the Czechoslovak government in exile.

However, the German-speaking Liechtensteins were marked as Germans in terms of both language and nationality in a 1930 census, which had a single column for language and nationality. This is an argument used by the Czech state up to now.

Date: 3 April 2019

Source: Hlidacipes.org

Type of media: Independent/trusted on-line medium

Author: Vojtěch Berger