

The head of the Czech-Lichtenstein Society: The property agreement is also good for the Czech Republic. I wish for the prince to live to see it done

**INTERVIEW / The Chairman of the Czech-Lichtenstein Society, Petr Svoboda, continues in the activities his grandfather, who worked for the Liechtenstein family and managed their property until the communist coup. "I'll take care of it for you here," he rejected the possibility of emigration, but then looked on as the prince's property was confiscated. In an interview with the daily FORUM 24, Petr Svoboda talks not only about his grandfather, but mainly about Czech-Lichtenstein relations, which are overshadowed by the reluctance of the Czech courts to recognise the Liechtensteins' claims for the return of property.**

**Your grandfather worked for the princely family of Liechtenstein. How did this happen and what did he do for them?**

Grandfather worked for the princely family for more than twenty years. He started at the central directorate in March 1925, he started there as the prince's judicial officer. After a certain time, specifically in December 1928, he was appointed by the Prince's Council of Justice. Grandfather studied law and in 1924, after working as a paralegal in the law office of Josef Dolanský, he passed the bar exams. With that title he was qualified to perform the functions of which I have spoken. Starting October 1, 1937, His Eminence Prince Franz I appointed him to the position of Director of the Central Directorate of the Prince of Liechtenstein Estates in Olomouc, to say it in full. During the war, he continued to perform this role, although afterwards, under pressure from the occupation authorities, he once again acted as a judicial council, because the Nazi occupation authorities could not imagine that someone with a Czech nationality would manage employees of German nationality. Regardless of the fact that many of the managed properties, whether it was forests or farms, were at that time on the territory of the Greater German Reich. Thus, grandfather once again performed the de jure role of the judicial council, but de facto he was still the Director. The formal management of the central directorate was overseen by Prince Karl Alfred, the brother of the reigning Prince Franz Joseph II.

**What followed after 1945 and especially after 1948?**

When liberation took place, grandfather continued in the role of director. During the summer, however, national administration was imposed on the Liechtenstein property. Grandfather continued to supervise the administration of the prince's property in the role of a leading official. The princely family, through its lawyers, tried to contradict the imposition of said administration. It was being resolved at the level of various courts within Czechoslovakia. But all hopes were lost after the communist coup, because on March 1, 1948, Mr Jaroslav Vodička was entrusted with the liquidation of the national administration of the Prince of Liechtenstein's property by the regional Action Committee of the National Front with immediate effect. In our family, there is a memory related to the fact that after the communist coup, Prince Franz Joseph

He sent a car from Vaduz with a driver with a message for the grandfather to pack up the whole family and come to Vaduz. Grandpa thanked them and said, "No, I'll stay here and watch over it for you here." My involvement in the whole thing is to some extent a follow-up on Grandpa's words and an effort to fulfil his legacy.

**Does this mean that if there was no communist coup, it could have happened that the princely family would have won in the courts because they are not covered by the Beneš decrees?**

After the end of the Second World War, the Minister of Agriculture was Július Ďuriš, who was an associate of Klement Gottwald, a hardened communist. The decision reached the Supreme Administrative Court and it was already an open secret that it would be decided that the confiscation was not justified. However, Ďuriš however stated that if this were to happen, it would arise analogously such as the lex Schwarzenberg would be the lex Liechtenstein. The final judgment of the Supreme Administrative Court was not handed down until 1951 in Bratislava, fully orchestrated by the communist regime.

**Your grandfather had a close relationship with the family. How did he bear watching the handling of the Liechtensteins property?**

My grandfather died when I was four years old. But I had the opportunity to grow up with my grandmother for a while and I took a lot from that time. Our family was closely connected with the princely family through my grandfather, and I know that my grandfather was bullied by the communist regime for this. He did menial jobs, he had to change them often. It was not easy for him to receive a pension either, and he had to go to court to get it.

**How do you evaluate the current situation, for example, the decisions of the Czech courts against the Liechtensteins?**

I think that it is a great pity that proper evidence is not allowed in individual court proceedings at the level of the first instance. The Prince of Liechtenstein Foundation has a lot of evidence to demonstrate the fact that the application of the Beneš decrees was not correct. To the best of my knowledge, in none of those trials was this evidence allowed. I think that is the biggest problem.

**How do you view the draft agreement from the Foundation?**

Even the results of independent surveys show that across society there is a preference for an amicable agreement. I'm all for it. It is much better to discuss things and come to an agreement than to argue for years. Litigation knows one winner and one loser, but a consensus has two winners, it is a win-win solution.

**What is the goal of the Czech-Liechtenstein Society?**

Our goal or mission is to continue the almost eight-year tradition of coexistence of Czechs, Moravians, Silesians and Liechtensteins. After all, this princely family is one of the noble families that has been firmly anchored in the region of the Lands of the Czech Crown for centuries. That is indisputable. Liechtensteiners are not Germans, although they speak German. Franz Joseph II grew up in Velké Losiny and spoke German and Czech. All this is an artificially created construction that suited the communists immediately after 1945.

**So, what does the Society do?**

We are trying to rebuild bridges between the Czech Republic and Liechtenstein. What was very cruelly torn apart by the confiscation, we want to rebuild and continue with once again. We would like to contribute to establishing relations between the two countries with our activities. And that also in order to somehow deal with the grievance that arose because of the communist set-up.

**How much does the feud continue to damage the relationships?**

That's an interesting question. The disagreement is one thing, but life goes on. We can't tell each other that we have an ongoing dispute, so we can't talk to each other. This is also evident from the fact that diplomatic relations were re-established in 2009. This dispute should not prevent various forms of cooperation, cultural exchange or joint economic activities. Of course, the dispute is under the surface, but the course of history cannot be stopped, we must move forward.

**Do you believe that an agreement will be reached in the foreseeable future?**

I would stress the word "foreseeable". I'm an older person now and life has taught me that expectations need to be modulated, but I really wish for the reigning prince Hans Adam II to live to see it happen. His father, Franz Joseph II, really wanted for his family to be stripped of the label that they were Germans tied to the Nazis. I would really like for that to happen.

**What is your Society up to this year?**

In April, a members meeting will take place in Vranov near Brno, close to where is the princely tomb. Other than that, I would state that the members have recently attended the opening in Kolín - 400 years of Liechtensteins in the Czech lands. We are preparing a trip to the Principality of Liechtenstein for our members for June. In autumn, we plan to visit the nature reserve in the southern part of the river Dyje and also one of the concerts at the Lednice-Valtice music festival.

**How do you think the Liechtensteins are viewed in our society and how has that changed over time?**

This is also confirmed by the aforementioned surveys, the younger generation is strongly inclined towards a peaceful solution. I think this is good news and a sign that the young generation is breaking free from the captivity of communist propaganda and its indoctrination into people's heads.

**Do you think that, due to the changing public opinion, our politicians will start to be a little braver in this regard?**

I'm not a politician and I can't quite imagine what it's like to be one. But for me, as a citizen, it is quite obvious that politicians, unfortunately, in most cases work with the horizon of a four-year electoral period. Therefore, I believe that what is interesting to the electorate simply plays a role in their decision-making. And other decisions are then moved down to second place.