

MAIN THEME - INTERVIEW

HEREDITARY PRINCE ALOIS OF LIECHTENSTEIN

Our family has surprising and far-reaching solutions in store for the Czech Republic



Let me start a bit provocatively: why are you still dwelling at the Czech Courtrooms, while you could invest time and money elsewhere?

My ancestors lived in the Czech Lands for more than 700 years and, together with the local population, brought about many positive developments, most striking is the impressive common cultural heritage. In my opinion, we owe it to our ancestors to remove the current obstacles and continue their positive work to a future not burdened by misconceptions of the past. If that means effort and struggle, so it be.

Is the Czech Republic worth it?

Of course. The past 700 years have shown this as much as the current political and economic outlook of the Czech Republic. The Czech Republic belongs to the most successful countries of the EU. We

should overcome the artificial divorce of the last 70 years and set a positive example in central Europe: our generation is ready to cultivate fruitfully our common history and heritage together instead of recurring to past divisions.

Do you think that any of your ancestors ever felt a German?

None of my ancestors felt "German" if you refer to the 2nd or even 3rd German Reich or to the Bundesrepublik. They already fought Prussia's rise – for instance on the battlefield of Kolin or in 1866 when the Principality last was involved in a war and did not even access the peace treaty with Prussia. However, we should stay far away from all nationalistic concepts. They only lay Europe in ruins. Repeatedly history has proven this and it again proves it today in another nightmare. This does not mean Europeans could or should not be patriots and feel attached to their homeland. This is what we all rightly do. However, it must not mean to disrespect others – which is what nationalism does.

Do you personally feel offended by the Czech legal system that continues to call the Liechtenstein citizens as Germans (and call it "notoriety")?

Yes indeed, I do. Not only because it is simply wrong, but very much because in our context we are called Germans in the terrible meaning of the Benes Decrees: "Cizazkych" Germans, barbarian intruders to the Czech lands. People endangering the Czech lands and therefor to be kicked or held out by all means to save the country. A pejorative insulting term transporting the worst prejudices for the purposes of the propaganda of the 1930s and 1940s. Instead of clarifying that Liechtensteiners are not within that box, we were deliberately put into that box now again. Looking at my personal pedigree and taking into account what my ancestors were able to contribute to the development of the Czech lands, especially for Moravia, I and my whole family find this particularly offending. It is alarming that now even some politicians use that term again as if the warnings of history would not be clear enough for all of us.

The panel organised by our magazine came to a conclusion that it would be in the interest of both sides to solve the dispute diplomatically. Do you still have patience to conduct such negotiations, or would you rather agree that now the ECHR should decide first?

Of course, I deeply respect the courts – our indispensable institutions for the rule of law and hence for personal freedom. A respect we all owe, even should we not agree with certain rulings. However, by their nature courts can only deliver digital solutions. Yes or no. For complex matters, negotiated solutions are better suited to carefully balance interests and develop win-win situations. And such solutions can be set up quicker. We are now in courts for eight years since the Czech Republic sued us. We might be stuck in courts for many more years to come. This is why I am always open for sitting down at the negotiation table and start working for viable solutions.

Do you consider Czech Republic an ally country?

Absolutely. The Czech Republic and Principality of Liechtenstein belong to the same community of European values and are closely linked through their joint membership of the European Economic

Area and many other agreements, in particular the Schengen and Dublin Agreements. Both countries stand for a liberal economy, are highly industrialized, pay much attention to a good education and believe that a slim and efficient administration serve peoples interests best.

I assume you cannot run into details, but can you express in general how far would you be able to come in searching for a win-win solution?

We have very far reaching and out of the box concepts for our family. However, as you know there is an interstate procedure pending at the Court in Strasbourg. The Czech Republic and the Principality of Liechtenstein are parties to the proceedings – not my family. Dozens of other Liechtenstein citizens have their claims and rely on a solution on the government level. Therefore, it would be inappropriate if I present our concepts now to the Czech public via the media. First, the Czech Government would have to revisit its standpoint, which was shaped by the former government. Then the Governments would enter into negotiations. In the course of such negotiations, all Liechtenstein victims will submit their proposals and so we will. We would play of course a very constructive role based on our principle reasoning which I explained to you.

Whenever any District court decides, some media are inevitably asking: if the POLF succeeded, would the Princely family open the castles and gardens for the public?

Yes. To be precise: we would continue to keep the iconic cultural sites open to the public. My ancestors opened many of them already roundabout 200 years ago. And we think we could improve their cultural value. We could start a cooperation with the Princely Collections. Look at what we do in Lower Austria and Vienna. Everybody can find a visible answer there.

Is the development before the Strasbourg court positive for the Principality to your knowledge?

This is a question for the Government. They handle this case. Therefore, you would have to approach the competent government officials. I only can judge from the rulings of Czech Courts against our family foundation. I find the approach of these rulings unconvincing in all important aspects and seemingly I am not alone with this assessment.

Is the option a financial compensation? Has the international court asked the Liechtenstein side for counting the possible just amount?

Compensation has to be paid to any foreigner whose property is taken and not handed back. That is a clear principle of international law. It would be a huge sum in our case. This is why we offered time and again to the Czech side to find different solutions – to no avail so far. The ECtHR approach in that field and at the present stage of the proceedings is another question you would have to ask the government of course. Indeed the applicable European Convention on Human Rights addresses the issue.