



EMBASSY
OF THE PRINCIPALITY OF LIECHTENSTEIN

Unofficial translation

ADDRESS
by
H.S.H Maria-Pia Kothbauer
Ambassador of the Principality of Liechtenstein

on the occasion of the
NEW YEAR'S RECEPTION
hosted by Federal President Dr. Alexander VAN DER BELLEN

8 January 2019

Your Excellency, Mr. Federal President,
Madam Schmidauer,
Your Excellency, Federal Minister Karin Kneissl,
Excellencies, Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the beginning of the New Year, it is a special honour and a great pleasure for me, to wish you, Mr. President, your esteemed wife as well as the entire Austrian people peace, happiness and prosperity in the New Year 2019 on behalf of the Diplomatic Corps accredited in Austria.

In the course of its history, Austria has given our world beautiful gifts. 200 years ago, in 1818, the famous Austrian song "Silent Night" was heard for the first time in a small chapel in Oberndorf near Salzburg. Every Christmas, over 2 billion people sing it in over 300 languages and dialects. Pope Francis has recently said it was "his favourite song". This song is popular all around the world and contains a strong message of peace. This is also where the political significance of this song lies; it is the search for peace and common ground that connects us.

In 2018, Austria made a special effort in the search for the common endeavour: towards the outside – within the framework of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union– as well as internally on the occasion of the commemoration of the founding of the First Republic 100 years ago.

It was impressive how carefully all those involved have dealt with the – sometimes difficult – national identification process of the new Republic with its great past, and how much attention was paid to ensuring that the whole population is involved in dealing with its history – both in commemorating and in celebrating.

Mr. President, in your speech on the occasion of the last National Day, you not only expressed your optimism, but emphasized the very special "Austrian". That "the world does not simply consist of black and white, of irreconcilable positions, but that a solution for the benefit of all always lies in the middle". Because, as you added, "only in the everlasting pursuit of common ground is the greatest possible good of all".

In this unifying spirit, Austria took on the responsible role of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of last year. Despite major European and global challenges, Austria's Presidency – with a newly composed Federal Government – was generally assessed as excellently managed, both in terms of content and organization.

From the abundance of topics that Austria had to deal with in this European function, the question of Brexit and the restructuring of the budget of the European Union were undoubtedly of particular importance. Further Austrian priorities, such as the issue of migration and increased economic cooperation with the African

continent, have received new impetus. Austria is particularly aware of the importance of the South-eastern European states for peace in Europe. Austria has succeeded in taking important steps for this region and in advancing the pre-accession process to the EU.

Multilateralism and the promotion of the principles of international law form the basis of Austrian foreign policy. This is, as the eminent Austro-American constitutional law expert Hans Kelsen described in his „General Theory of Law and State“, the quasi-democratic character of international relations. By this, he means the sovereign equality of states.

This understanding is currently challenged in international relations. The recognition that global problems such as climate change, armed conflicts, poverty and the resulting migration also need global answers has always guided Austrian foreign policy.

Austria is to be thanked for its strong advocacy of these principles, be it as the host country of the United Nations and the OSCE, be it on fundamental issues of international law, disarmament, the important non-proliferation of nuclear weapons or on the ground in the crisis regions of our world, such as Ukraine, the southern Mediterranean or the Middle East. Austria, in its commitment to peace in the world, has always brought to the fore combatting human suffering.

A global concern that affects us all, and especially the youth, is climate change. Your insistent appeal from Katowice, Mr. President, which you have strengthened in a special way together with Arnold Schwarzenegger, has found great support. We hope that your important climate initiative, supported by 20 European Heads of State, will have a growing impact over the coming years.

The year 2019 will be a particularly important year for the European Union. As a result of the elections to the European Parliament, there will be changes in the European institutions involving personnel restructuring at the level of the executive positions.

This year is also marked by the commemoration of the fall of the Iron Curtain 30 years ago. Austria has taken a central role in this regard. This was associated with a spirit of optimism and the beginning of the still incomplete growing together in Europe. At the same time, in 2019, the European Union will have to cope with the withdrawal of the United Kingdom.

Whatever challenges will have to be faced in our states and in international relations this year, we will be well advised to remind ourselves of your words, esteemed Mr. President, about the particularly "Austrian" – the endeavour to find common ground.

Finally, on behalf of my colleagues and their spouses, I would like to thank you very much, Mr. President, for your invitation to the New Year's Reception.

To you, your esteemed wife, to the members of the Federal Government, in particular to the Minister for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, and to all your staff, we offer our best wishes for the year 2019.

We express our heartfelt thanks for the always open doors and the constant support we receive from the staff of the Presidential Chancellery and from your House and your staff, Madam Minister, our esteemed Austrian colleagues. We all benefit from the high level of professionalism and the extensive know-how of Austrian diplomacy.

We especially wish all Austrians a time of prosperity and peace for the year 2019.

As representative of Liechtenstein, I would like to conclude by expressing great joy that you, esteemed Mr. President, and your wife will be celebrating the 300th anniversary of our country with us in Liechtenstein in two weeks.

I thank you very much!