

## Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations speaks at UVU



### *Ambassador Jan Kickert speaks at UVU*

On February 19, 2019, the Utah International Mountain (UIMF), a coalition of student clubs at Utah Valley University (UVU) co-hosted the prestigious event. At the beginning, Dr. Lago, VP for Global Engagement at UVU introduced Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nation, Ambassador Jan Kickert. Austrian diplomat spoke on the theme: “What foreign policy for a small country? The case of Austria.” Ambassador Kickert said that the role of foreign policy is crucial to the survival strategy of Austria. He stated that foreign policy is usually important area for big nations, like the United States, Russia, or China. Do small countries have a foreign policy? There are about 200 states on this planet and currently 193 of them are United Nations members. Palestine and the Holy See (Vatican) are observer states. Ambassador Kickert’s mentioned that the foreign policy of every nation is influenced by geography and history. Therefore, this is a case for Austria, as a small land-locked country in the center of Europe, in the cross-roads of east and west that have thousands of years of history. Recent history is an influential part of the foreign policy of Austria. A small country now, it used to be a big empire until the First World War. Then,

it disintegrated into new countries, which have been founded by different people of the former empire. Austria had 6 million people as a state with Vienna, an over-sized capital of 2 million people. Likewise, the people, which were left over, didn't know what to do then. There were even two referendums in two of provinces whether to leave Austria and join other nations.

Like many countries in the inter-war period, Austria also briefly had a civil war and an undemocratic regime, based on Austro-fascism. It leaned towards Italian fascism and opposed to Nazism. In 1934 the chancellor of Austria was assassinated. What is also an unknown, the fact that in 1938, the Anschluss of Austria to Hitler's Germany was a result of the pre-emptive military strike to avoid a referendum on staying independent. With the invasion of Nazi troops, situation was reversed. Ambassador Jan Kickett stated that under the barrel of a gun, one can be confident what the outcome of a referendum would be: 99% of Austrians voted for the Anschluss. And it is similar to the situation in Crimea in 2014. Many Austrians were part and parcel of the horror regime of the Nazis, among the worst perpetrators of the Nazi death machine, and many were collaborators. This also had an influence on the foreign policy of Austria after the war.

In 1945, Austria had the same fate as Germany. Four powers, France, United States, United Kingdom, and U.S.S.R occupied parts of Austria. The capital, Vienna, was divided in 4 zones like Berlin. Everyone is aware of what happened in Berlin, but not so many people know, that the same situation existed in Austria. Austria was not permanently divided, like Germany, for a simple reason: neutrality. As Ambassador Kickett stressed, Austria decided not to join any military pact. He mentioned that he meant not to join NATO. And that was in the strategic interest of the Soviet Union. Austrians were able to negotiate a state treaty in 1955 and to regain a sovereignty and full independence.

It was a historic opportunity for Austria. In diplomacy, country must seize the moment where it sees the opportunity. Same with the German reunification. Had it not been for the German chancellor who went for the reunification of East and West Germany. If Germans' been hesitant, they'd have a different outcome. The political price of neutrality had a long-term effect on Austrian policy. Not being a member of NATO or any military pact provided Austria an important niche in foreign policy. In case of Austria, it payed off mostly during the Cold War time where the iron curtain was on east of Austria; and the country was in the west. Austria made itself a bridge, a go-between, a meeting point, in Salzburg and other places. It provided Austria the opportunity to have a particular area of diplomacy. Austria was also able to engage with Russia more because

Moscow trusted Vienna more than the Western Germans who were solidly in one camp. The Austrians were able to find a niche, and it's a big achievement for a small country in diplomacy.



*Cory Levin with Ambassador Jan Kickert*

Finally, Ambassador Kickert emphasized that the international law is fundamental to Austria. His nation wants to advance many conventions where it can agree upon various fields. For example, although the Paris Climate Change Agreement is so important to reverse global warming, it is not enough. That is the reason why the United Nations Secretary General has called for a climate summit in September to accelerate the change and to de-carbonize global economy

and make it sustainable. That brought the Ambassador Kickert to the theme of sustainable development goals. He mentioned, that faculty and students in the audience can be proud of themselves to host the UN conference in August in Utah. He thanked UVU and everybody in the audience for such a great interest and support to the United Nations. He praised that many of students will go to New York to attend United Nations sessions this spring. That is great! Ambassador said, that “We need to work collectively. The challenges we have today cannot be solved unilaterally. You need partnerships. Nobody can build walls to insulate themselves from the rest of the world.”

This was very inspiring presentation of the Ambassador Jan Kickert.

*Cory Levin. UVU Student and UIMF member*