

Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations lectured at UVU



The Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations, Ambassador Jan Kickert lectured at Utah Valley University on February 19, 2019. The focus of his presentation was how to be a successful for a small country, like Austria, when it comes to international relations. The Ambassador Jan Kickert, shared with audience some information about himself and his background both academic one and the jobs he's had during the years. He briefly mentioned that he has a major in geography and history or IR, I cannot recall now. With that in mind, he said that foreign relations are influenced by both geography and history. Then he commented about the history of Austria. Before WWI, it was a large empire but at the end of the war it was left it in a "rump" state and between wars there was a civil war, an economic depression and fascism started to flourish in 1934. The country was divided when it came to the support of the Nazi party. In 1945, Austria had the same fate as Germany: it was divided into small parts and four Major Powers occupied the country with one of them being in Vienna. The division was not permanent because Austria was a neutral state and therefore did not join NATO. In 1955, Austria was able to regain

its sovereignty and independence. In excellent way Ambassador explained that it happened because Austria seized a historic opportunity for a small country to be neutral and not being part of any political alliance. This decision made Austria a bridge between the major powers during the Cold War, and the facilitating an interaction between major powers gave Austria a niche. Finding such a niche is crucial to small countries, such as Austria, to gain influence in foreign politics. A viable result of finding a niche for small countries was that Austria is one of the four UN headquarters. After 1989 and the fall of communism, Austria was finally able to join EU: this provided the opportunity for the country to openly trade with EU countries, hence expanding a market for itself. Involvement in global organizations is crucial for Austria to have its voice heard, and it has done this by giving back with involvement in peacekeeping efforts aka focusing on disarmament. Ambassador Kickert emphasized that being part of global organizations is important for small countries because of the need in a rule-based international law system, such as “insurance policy”. Without it, larger countries will want to dominate global affairs. Ambassador Kickert closed the presentation by mentioning that a country cannot thrive if it becomes insulated from the world as everybody has to work collectively to keep global warming from happening and keep peace.

It was an amazing experience for me to meet Ambassador Kickert because I was not able to meet someone like him in my short years of higher education. Ambassador Kickert was so nice, and I admire his way of answering questions in a formal manner but still simple enough for college students. I honestly did not know enough about Austria, so I came prepared to learn, and I was not disappointed. In our media, all we know about Austria was that it is one of the places of origin of the classical music, but the country played a very important role during many centuries of the world history. It is admirable for Austria to have such a higher place in world organizations and still Ambassador Kickert was humble enough to make jokes about the voting process at the UN. Small countries are often overlooked by the important role played by the big powers. I hope to keep learning about small countries that are slowly making strides to influence the world.

Samantha Tiburcio, UVU student